THE Friendly Monitor; OR A DISCOURSE,

Pointing out ſome of thoſe

Errors and Imperfections IN THE CONDUCT OF *CHRISTIANS*,

By which they leſſen both

THEIR OWN REPUTATION

And THAT of

RELIGION.

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THE PREFACE.

NEXT to the knowledge of God in Chriſt, *the knowledge moſt deſirable, and of the higheſt importance to us, is the* knowledge of ourſelves. *Neither of theſe without the other can be complete, or ſerve any valuable purpoſe. The ground of which inſeparable connection between the* knowledge *of God, and of man, are thoſe neceſſary relations which the* Beings *themſelves have one to the other. For how can we act conformably to theſe relations, if we have not firſt a good underſtanding of our own nature, and of the nature and will of our great Creator?*

THE knowledge which every man is concern'd to get of himſelf, *is either more* general, *or* particular. *The* general *knowledge of a man's ſelf, is attain'd by the conſideration of thoſe things in which all men agree, without the leaſt diſtinction betwixt them; ſuch as the dignity of the human nature in its primitive ſtate, the corruption of it by ſin, the hopeleſs ſtate of guilt and impotence in which we lie without the grace of God, juſtifying, and ſanctifying us. This knowledge is of abſolute neceſſity.*

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The other knowledge of ourſelves, which is more particular *and private, conſiſts in an intimate acquaintance with our own diſtinguiſhing character; our ſtate and condition in a religious capacity; our prevailing inclinations; our attainments and defects: what there is commendable in us, and worthy to be cheriſh'd, and what that is otherwiſe. Now, tho' we cannot ſay of this knowledge, as of the former, that it is eſſentially neceſſary; yet we may ſay, that it is apparently uſeful; how apt ſoever one might be to conclude the contrary from its being ſo generally neglected.*

WHO that loves *himſelf, in the* right manner, *would not willingly* correct *every thing that needs correction in his notions, or temper, or conduct? and* improve *whatever deſerves, and is capable of improvement? were it only on this reflection, that the greater his* ſpiritual perfection *is, the greater will be his ſelf-enjoyment? and the fewer his ſlips and frailties, the fewer will be his diſguſts, and the leſs occaſion he will have to blame and condemn himſelf? And when to this argument of* ſelf-love, *we farther add that which is drawn from the* love of God, *and* our neighbour; *how obſervant ſhould we be of our behaviour? how careful to remark, and how ready to mend, the leaſt errors, tho' they are but as* motes in the eye, *that may render us leſs capable of glorifying the one, and edifying the other? When we attend to theſe things, we ſhall think it a little ſurprizing, that, with regard*

gard to a great many Chriſtians, as long as they keep themſelves from eſſential errors, and groſs faults, it is the leaſt part of their care, how they ſhall reform the defects of their temper, and model their converſation ſo, as to conquer the prejudices, and gain the favourable opinion, of thoſe, who are ſtrangers, and enemies to ſerious religion. By this means, it often happens, that the infirmities and follies of the man *very much obſcure the graces of the* Chriſtian, *and weaken their influence.*

A GREAT part of the following diſcourſe, tho' not compos'd for ſuch an occaſion, nor, as ſome will be apt to think, very well fitted to it, was preach'd at Lyme *in* Dorſetſhire, April 23. 1728, *before an aſſembly of miniſters; the perſon, who was to have perform'd that part, having fail'd them. They were ſo well pleaſed with the ſubject, as not only to excuſe the defects of the ſermon, but to join in a requeſt that it might be made more publick; adding this reaſon for it, which I own is one of the ſtrongeſt they could have us'd with me, that ſuch a diſcourſe was needed, and might be of ſome ſervice.*

I AM very ſenſible 'tis an ungrateful work I have here undertaken. But, if any find themſelves touch'd, I hope, they will conſider the goodneſs of my intention, and, for the ſake of that, pardon the liberty I have us'd. I have endeavour'd to handle each caſe with all the tenderneſs conſiſtent with plain-dealing: nor is it, God knows, to upbraid any,

any, that I ſhew them their imperfections; or from a fond conceit of my being without fault my ſelf; but out of a ſincere regard to religion, which I ſhould be glad to ſee appear with greater advantage in the lives of good men. That the diſcourſe here offer'd to the publick may contribute to this important end, the author commends it to the divine bleſſing; and intreats thoſe, into whoſe hands it ſhall come, laying aſide all prejudice, to read it with a reſolution of making it as uſeful to themſelves as they can.

ROMANS XIV. 16.

Let not then your good be evil ſpoken of.

SO difficult a thing is it to perſuade people to change old cuſtoms, tho' for much better, that of the *Jews*, who embraced *Chriſtianity*, the greater part, like the ſervant that lov'd his maſter, and would not go out free, were not very willing to accept of the liberty, offer'd them by the goſpel, from the heavy yoke of ceremonial inſtitutions. It required ſome time to wean them from their prejudices in favour of the religion they had been bred up in; by which means, it came to paſs, that in the Chriſtian Church (which conſiſted of converts of all ſorts, from *Heatheniſm*, and *Judaiſm*, of ſtronger, and of weaker, judgments) there was, from the firſt plantation of it, a diverſity of opinions and uſages; ſome adhering to the diſtinction which the law had made between meats and days; others paying no manner of regard to it, as rightly apprehending it to be aboliſh'd by Chriſt. So the *Apoſtle* obſerves in the beginning of this *chapter*, that while *One believeth he may eat all things, another, that is weak, eateth herbs*; that is, he will take up with a

dinner of herbs, rather than touch any kind of food, forbidden by the law. *One man eſteemeth one day above another: Another eſteemeth every day alike.* ver. 2 and 5. In this difference of ſentiments, the duty of the contending parties lay in two things: *Firſt*, In forbearing all raſh and uncharitable reflections upon each other: And, *ſecondly*, in following after the things wherewith they might one edify another. They were not only to conſider things in their intrinſic nature, but in their circumſtances; and to conſult the intereſt of ſouls, and of religion. See the 3*d*, the 13*th* and 19*th* verſes. This latter part of the advice did more particularly concern ſuch as, having juſt notions of Chriſtian liberty, labour'd not under thoſe miſtakes and ſcruples which perplexed and entangled others. They knew that *all things are lawful*, which were ſo before the law of ceremonies made them otherwiſe; but ought not to forget, that *all things are not expedient:* They were not to abuſe their liberty by an unſeaſonable oſtentation of it, to the hurt and offence of their Chriſtian brother: *Deſtroy not him with thy meat for whom Chriſt died*, ver. 15. Don't be the occaſion of another man's turning apoſtate to Chriſtianity, or acting againſt his conſcience, rather than deny thy ſelf in ſo ſmall a matter: Reconcile him by *arguments*, if thou art able, to thy innocent freedoms; but if thy *arguments* convince him not, let not thy *example* be a ſtumbling-block to him;

either by tempting him to do what in his conſcience he believes not to be lawful; or by provoking him, out of ſpite and reſentment at thy behaviour, to forſake, or ſtand more looſe and indifferent to, the profeſſion of that religion, which, you ſay, gives you thoſe offenſive indulgences. After which, it follows, *Let not then your good be evil ſpoken of.* It is good that every man ſhould be acquainted with *the liberty, wherewith Chriſt hath made him free, and that he ſhould ſtand faſt in this liberty*; but then, let him endeavour ſo to order his converſation and behaviour, as not to prejudice the common cauſe, and to give any handle for ſpeaking evil of a thing, which, rightly uſed, is very good. This is the connection and meaning of the text. But, without confining myſelf to this particular caſe, I ſhall, in diſcourſing on theſe words, make them as generally inſtructive as I am able, and, to this end, lay down the following doctrine.

Doctrine. It is the duty of all profeſſing Chriſtianity to be exceeding careful that what is good in itſelf do not, through ſome fault of theirs, paſs under an ill name.

By *good* we are *chiefly* to underſtand that which is of a *moral* and *ſpiritual* kind; not merely *deſirable*, which we call *natural* good, but *laudable*, and ſuch as renders a perſon worthy of reſpect and commendation; the *good* of *virtue* of *grace* and *holineſs*; the *good* that conſiſts in the conformity of the temper, or actions and beha-

viour, to the law of reaſon, and the rules of the goſpel, to the divine nature, and the human.

IN handling this ſubject, I ſhall, *firſt*, ſomewhat largely open, and explain the doctrine; and then, *ſecondly*, prove and enforce it by ſome proper conſiderations.

Firſt, I ſhall open the doctrine under theſe two heads, *namely*, as the duty relates to Chriſtians in general; and as it more particularly affects thoſe that *love the Lord Jeſus in ſincerity*.

I SHALL, in the *firſt* place, conſider the advice, as it reſpects indifferently all the profeſſors of the goſpel. And very neceſſary it is for all to be cautioned againſt furniſhing occaſion for *their good to be evil ſpoken of*. Give me leave to inſtance in ſome particulars.

1. *CHRISTIANITY* is undoubtedly a very *good thing*; and a very good thing it is to make a publick profeſſion of it; and yet, if Chriſtians do not take care to live according to their religion, they muſt expect, that both that, and their profeſſion of it too, will be *evil ſpoken of*; the former *unjuſtly*, the latter with too much reaſon. From the very beginning, there were thoſe who diſgraced the *Chriſtian Name*, by ſheltering their corruptions and immoralities under it. Whence proceeded ſuch complaints as theſe, *Phil.* 3. 18. *Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies to the croſs of Chriſt.* 2 Pet. ii. 2. *Many ſhall follow their pernicious ways, by reaſon*

reaſon of whom the way of truth ſhall be evil ſpoken of. This, no doubt, did very much retard the progreſs of the goſpel, which, tho' in thoſe times it was really wonderful, would have been more remarkable ſtill, if they that came over to it had, with their old *errors*, *more univerſally* forſaken their old *vices* too. Chriſtianity is too ſtrict, too pure and divine a religion, to be without enemies in ſuch a world as this. While Chriſtianity declares open war againſt the luſts and paſſions of men, theſe luſts will, in revenge, put them on obſerving whatever may be to the diſadvantage of Chriſtianity, and ſeem to juſtify them in their oppoſition to it; particularly, the wicked lives of all who call themſelves Chriſtians, and are not. Theſe, will they ſay, are ſaints of the earth; the generation that are pure in their own eyes; ſee the boaſted efficacy of their religion! they tell us of ſtrange things accompliſh'd by it; how it raiſes humane nature, and transforms men into angels; but if they can produce no better proofs of it than the effects it hath in them, we muſt be excus'd if we think their religion to be as human, or rather, to be as much a cheat and an impoſture, as any of thoſe religions which they ſo ſeverely condemn. *Juſtin Martyr*[a], one of the firſt *Apologiſts* for Chriſtianity, found himſelf obliged to take notice of the ſame objection. "They, among us, that live

[a] *Apol.* 1.

"not

" not as they ſhould, may have expoſed the " whole body of Chriſtians to reproach; but " (adds he) very unreaſonably, ſince you muſt " be ſenſible that ſome who take the name and " habit of Philoſophers, do nothing that is wor- " thy of their profeſſion; either, therefore, the " objection holds againſt Chriſtianity and Philo- " ſophy both; or againſt neither." But tho' it be very unreaſonable to make mens perſonal characters, how bad ſoever, an objection againſt their religion; yet 'tis ſuch an objection as nothing will effectually ſilence but greater care, in the profeſſors of the goſpel, to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. And this is one principal cauſe, why Chriſtians, who live in heathen countries, or intermingled with heathens, can do no more good upon them by all their diſputes, and diſcourſes; finding them invincibly ſet againſt a change of their religion on this very account [b]. For to what purpoſe ſhould they embrace a *new* religion, and continue the *ſame* men? if they do not grow worſe. Indeed, as in this nation the Chriſtian religion is eſtabliſh'd, and few openly profeſs to diſbelieve it, there may not ſeem to be the like danger from the corruptions of Chriſtians to the cauſe of Chriſtianity itſelf. But then, if we conſider the ſceptical humour that prevails among

[b] *Perry*'s account of *Muſcovy*, and the account of the ſucceſs of the *Daniſh* Miſſionaries.

us,

us, and that nothing promotes it more than the little influence which Chriſtianity hath upon the lives and tempers of men, we ſhall acknowledge it to be every one's concern, who wiſhes well to his religion, to be more watchful over his conduct. But, alas! what reaſon can we have to hope, that men, who will not be deter'd from a ſinful courſe by conſiderations of their own guilt and danger, will be much mov'd by arguments taken from the credit of religion! It is, however, fit that ſuch perſons ſhould be told, that what religion loſes of its eſteem by the diſhonour they do it, ſhall be charged to their account; and that together with the credit of religion they forfeit their own much more; and cannot wonder if the pretences they make to religion are treated with contempt and ridicule. A *wicked man* is a diſhonourable character; but a *wicked profeſſor* is much worſe: Nor muſt they think to maintain their reputation in the world, who do ſo much to ſink the reputation of their moſt holy faith. As the ſin of *Eli*'s ſons *was great* in that *they cauſed men to abhor the offering of the Lord* [c], ſo through the juſt judgment of God it fell heavy on themſelves; for *them that honour him, God will honour, but they that deſpiſe him ſhall be lightly eſteemed* [c].

2. *ZEAL*, for that which is good, *is a good thing*; and yet is many times in danger of being

[c] 1 *Sam.* ii. 17, 30.

evil

evil ſpoken of; particularly, if it be an *ignorant* zeal, or not *impartial* and *uniform*. To be zealouſly affected for a thing, and hardly know *why*, or *for what*; to eſpouſe a good cauſe, but without good reaſon; (which is not only very poſſible, but very common) and be able to ſay no more for the *truth*, than the deluded people did for their *idol*, when they *cried out with one voice for the ſpace of two hours together, great is Diana of the Epheſians*[d]; to be led by ſuch an ignorant zeal, is the ready way to expoſe the beſt cauſe in the world; for if the cauſe be judged of by the imperfections of the perſons embark'd in it, (which is the uſual method of proceeding) the truth itſelf will unavoidably ſuffer in ſuch hands, and be reckon'd deſtitute of all arguments to ſupport it, becauſe they that are warmeſt for it are able to produce none. Or, if it ſhould ſo happen that the *cauſe* is never the worſe ſpoken of for our ignorance, yet our *zeal* will; which every one will be ready to attribute to pride, or paſſion, or intereſt, or party-prejudice, or hazard; and, to conclude, would have been the ſame, if education or accident had thrown us on the other ſide; by which means, the benefit of the example, which our zeal might otherwiſe have afforded, will be loſt; and, which is worſe, zeal ſhall come to be regarded as no virtue, but made a term of reproach; as the word *Orthodoxy*

[d] *Acts* xix. 34.

hath

hath been from much the ſame cauſe. We ſhould, therefore, acquaint ourſelves with the goodneſs of thoſe things for which we expreſs a zeal; that, if they are excellent, we may diſcern their excellency; we ſhould yield God and religion a *reaſonable ſervice*; and have ſome juſt and ſufficient ground for preferring one opinion and way to another. And as our zeal, tho' for that which is good, will paſs under an ill name, if it be join'd with ignorance; ſo will it too, if it be not *impartial* and *uniform*. A zeal that is reſtrain'd to ſome things, and overlooks others, which are of equal, or greater, goodneſs and neceſſity, will never gain us much reputation. Thus ſome, who contend earneſtly for the *truth*, ſhall have no concern at all for *peace* and *purity*, for *liberty* and *charity*. Their behaviour is turbulent, pragmatical, and contentious, their converſation looſe and ſcandalous, their principles narrow and rigid, and their temper fitted for perſecution, if the name were not become ſo odious. Others, again, are mighty *advocates* for Chriſtian *liberty* and *charity*, and as great *ſtrangers* to Chriſtian *holineſs*. They liſt themſelves on the ſide of liberty and charity, not ſo much out of love to theſe things, as indifference to the truth, or their being ſecretly of opinions contrary to thoſe that are receiv'd. *Gallio*'s notion of the quarrel between the *Jews* and the Apoſtle *Paul*, that it was only *a queſtion of*

words and names [e], is too much theirs in regard of the moſt momentous articles of religion; and therefore, like him, they care for none of theſe things. Chriſtianity is a conſiſtent frame of doctrines and precepts; and, being ſo, we ſhould endeavour to maintain the like conſiſtency in our zeal for the ſeveral parts of it; not ſacrificing ſome to others, and breaking one command for the ſake of keeping another. It is, I confeſs, no eaſy matter to preſerve the *golden mean* in *religious diſputes*, and to hold the ballance ſo evenly betwixt truth on one hand, and peace and charity on the other, as to give all of them their due; but, difficult as this is, it is not impoſſible to thoſe who are under the direction of the *Father of lights*, whoſe illuminations, in a diligent and unbiaſs'd application to the means of knowledge and wiſdom, they piouſly and conſtantly implore; and are acted by a ſpirit of ſincerity, humility, and love, which they induſtriouſly cheriſh, and faithfully follow. Such as theſe *God will guide in judgment*, not only leading them into the knowledge of all neceſſary truth, but into the moſt proper methods of defending it. Which is a privilege they muſt not expect, who imitate a certain bigot that I have read of. Being preſs'd by his adverſary, and not able to anſwer his arguments, he promis'd to enquire after the truth with more care than he had done; but having

[e] *Acts* xviii. 15 and 17.

beg'd of God to open his eyes, and discover the right way to him, he was, upon this single address, and without taking any farther pains, fill'd with such an overflowing light and joy, as to determine with himself, that he would never quit his former opinion. Worthy enquirers after truth! saith one; to think that God vouchsafes such large measures of his Spirit, in answer to a single prayer, as to qualify men to judge in the most difficult and important points without all danger of mistake!

3. THE outward practice and appearance of any duty or grace is so far good; but, if attended with a manifest neglect of other essential duties, will certainly fall under censure. And can we think of no instances of this kind? Persons that make great pretensions to *piety*, but come miserably short in point of *justice*, and *temperance?* or maintain a fair character, as to one, or both, of these latter, but appear to be utterly void of a spirit of piety? What shall we call the piety of the one sort, and the justice and sobriety of the other? What is the former better than hypocrisy? or the latter than worldly policy, common prudence, or a happiness of temper? The *Pharisees*, according to St. *Paul*'s Account of them, were the *strictest sect* [f] of the *Jewish* religion; they pray'd long and often, and put on a shew of more than ordinary sanctity and mor-

[f] *Acts* xxvi. 5.

tification, insomuch that the common people were impos'd upon by their dissimulation, and had as good an opinion of them, if that were possible, as they had of themselves. And yet, *our Lord* more than once joins *pharisee* and *hypocrite* together, as if on one side they were terms equivalent, and every Pharisee, almost, were a hypocrite, tho' not every hypocrite a Pharisee. The reason was, that their extraordinary devotion was merely a cover to their cruelty, their oppression, and injustice. And very probably, the honester and wiser part of the *Jews* had much the same notion of these men as our Saviour had, and knew how to distinguish what was only paint, and that none of the best, from real life. And it is not altogether unlikely that, as the sect of the *Sadducees* was directly opposite to that of the *Pharisees* (one of them being as openly loose both in principles and practice as the other was professedly strict in both) so it owed its growth very much to it. The Pharisees were *hypocrites*, the Sadducees *libertines*; and what more common than for libertinism to be farther'd and propagated by hypocrisy? The thing hath been usual, and is perfectly natural. Hypocrisy is such an odious thing, especially in religion, that men fancy they can never get at too great a distance from it, and so, to avoid one extreme, run into another; and are, perhaps, secretly pleas'd to have so plausible an excuse for their contempt of *the form of godliness*.

If,

If, therefore, we would have the world look on our piety as ſincere and genuine, and, with our own credit, would recover that of religion, and the duties of it, let us not wear our religion only, as people do their beſt clothes, on particular times and occaſions; but bring it into our ordinary conduct, and make it the governing principle of our actions; let this animate and direct our converſation as the ſoul doth the body; with the duties of the *firſt table* let us join thoſe of the *ſecond*, and admit the moral virtues, if in no other quality, yet, as ſervants to wait on religion, and fill up its train. The *Jews* were apt to lay ſuch a ſtreſs on ſacrificing as to think, however impure they were in their moral converſation, it was but to offer ſacrifice and they ſhould be clean; in oppoſition to which conceit of theirs it ſeems to be, that *Solomon* obſerves, *by mercy and truth iniquity is purged, and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.* Prov. xvi. 6. And the *Prophet*, in anſwer to the queſtion, *wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings? with calves of a year old?* &c. ſaith no more than this; *he hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* Micah vi. 6, 7, 8. The ſame Men attributed a ſtrange virtue to ſaying many prayers, as if for every prayer they ſhould have a certain number

number of ſins ſtruck off from the guilty ſcore; wherein, they have a great many followers among the profeſſors of Chriſtianity. Such will do well to read and conſider thoſe words of the prophet; *When ye ſpread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. Waſh ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well* &c. *Come now, and let us reaſon together, ſaith the Lord: tho' your ſins be as ſcarlet, they ſhall be as white as ſnow; tho' they be red like crimſon, they ſhall be as wool.* Iſaiah i. 15—18. On the other hand; let not thoſe who, not ſetting up for the character of godly perſons, are free from the charge of religious craft, and diſſimulation, boaſt too much of their moral virtues. They affect to be thought ſtrictly juſt; and, poſſibly, are ſo in their worldly trade, and buſineſs; but are they *temperate in all things?* Perhaps, they are both juſt and temperate; but ſhall we therefore praiſe them? and number them among the truly virtuous? We praiſe them not. As long as they are irreligious, it is not poſſible they ſhould be ſincerely virtuous; the outſide of ſome virtues they may practiſe; but as to the ſubſtantial, vital part, are as entirely deſtitute of them, as they are of religion, and piety. They practiſe no one virtue in obedience to the command of God; for then they would practiſe all; and wanting the fear, and love of God, they want the eſſential

eſſential principle of all virtue, and the only thing that can preſerve it in all aſſaults. Let the men of this denomination farther reflect, that the perſons, before mentioned, who attempt to divide piety from morality, have not done the cauſe of piety a greater injury; than they, by their naked, lifeleſs, form of virtue, have done to morality; ſo that while piety, in their account, is only the dreſs of a Phariſee; morality, in return, is reckon'd by others the accompliſhment of a pagan; grace is ſuppos'd to be an enemy to morality, and morality to grace; tho' there be the ſtricteſt, and moſt inſeparable, alliance between them; great numbers of combatants draw up on both ſides, and engage with ſo much fierceneſs, as to give opportunity for a third ſort to ſtep in, that are equal enemies to religion and virtue, and deſtroy the foundations of both, by reſolving them into opinion and cuſtom, or intereſt and deſign.

4. It is good for every one to rely on Jeſus Chriſt for ſalvation; the ſcripture having told us, that *there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we can be ſaved*[g]. But then, this reliance muſt be in a way of holineſs and obedience; or will neither be an honour to Chriſt, nor of any advantage to ourſelves. And how deplorable then is it, that this preſumptuous truſt in Chriſt ſhould be as common as a well-regulated

[g] *Acts* iv. 12.

truſt

truſt is rare? Under a pretence of vindicating the doctrine of *free grace*, ſome have learnt to diſcard *good works*. That faith juſtifies without works, is an opinion eſpous'd by many good men, who, at the ſame time, have acknowledged that there is no being ſav'd without them; on which account, we ought to make a wide difference between them and ſome looſe Chriſtians; who, that they may have peace, notwithſtanding they go on in their evil ways, encourage themſelves in the merits of Chriſt, and the grace of the goſpel; and venture to run the hazard of, what is call'd, a *death-bed repentance*; that is, of making their peace with God, by imploring his mercy, and committing themſelves to the protection of their Saviour, with their laſt breath. I ſhall not enter into any diſpute with the former, but only deſire them to conſider, whether ſaying, as they do, that the covenant of grace is *unconditional*, and good works are excluded not only as *meritorious* of juſtification, but, as having any influence at all towards it, hath not been the unhappy means of hardening ſome in their wicked courſes; and whether, therefore, they ought to be ſo very fond of their ſcheme, in caſe there be any other which equally conſults the honour of God's grace, without being liable to the ſame abuſe. To the latter, I ſhall not ſcruple to ſay, that no perſons in the world reproach Chriſt, and faith in him, more than they do. They repreſent him as *a friend to publicans and ſinners*,

ſinners, in much the ſame ſenſe as the Phariſees accus'd him of being ſo; as if he delighted in ſuch company, and had no zeal for the honour of God, and his law. There would be too much foundation for ſuch a charge as this againſt our bleſſed Maſter, if there was any for that dependence which ſome have on the Merits of Chriſt, who live in the open contempt and violation of the commands of the goſpel. Suppoſing ſuch men as theſe to have any real ground for their hopes, it muſt be ſaid, that Chriſt is a friend of ſinners, not becauſe *he came to call them to repentance*, (in which ſenſe he freely owns himſelf their friend) but even *as* ſinners, whom he is willing to ſave *without* repentance; or upon ſuch a repentance as is next to none. Whether they conſider it or no, this is the plain language of their reliance on Chriſt in an unregenerate State. Our Saviour's words to the *Jews*, *Do not think that I will accuſe you to the Father: there is one that accuſes you, even Moſes, in whom ye truſt, for had ye believed Moſes, ye would have believed me.* John v. 45, 46. Theſe words, I ſay, are with a little variation very applicable here. We need not accuſe you to God; there is one that accuſeth you, even Chriſt, in whom ye truſt. You cannot truſt more to your being the diſciples of Chriſt, than the *Jews* did to their being the diſciples of *Moſes*; and yet their boaſted zeal for the law of *Moſes* would not juſtify them; nay, nor ſo much as prove, that

they truly believed in him. There is no doubt, but they believed the law of *Moſes* to be divine; and why then does Chriſt upbraid them with the want of faith? The reaſon is, that not having a right notion of the law of *Moſes*, which was intended as *a ſchoolmaſter to lead them unto Chriſt*, their faith was to all intents and purpoſes the ſame as no faith; which makes our Lord ſay, *Had ye believed Moſes, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me.* In like manner, we may addreſs ourſelves to thoſe who glory in Chriſt Jeſus, and talk much of their faith in him, while they take no care to keep his commandments; whatever you fancy, you do not believe in Chriſt; for if ye believed Chriſt, you would believe the neceſſity of a holy life, which his goſpel aſſerts, and inſiſts upon, in ſo many places. What you call *your faith*, therefore, *is vain, and you are yet in your ſins.* I make no queſtion, but a great many have entertain'd diſhonourable thoughts of the doctrines of *free grace*, and *juſtification by faith*, and of the *Chriſtian revelation* which teaches theſe doctrines; becauſe of the ill uſe that is made of them by multitudes profeſſing the goſpel. They take it for granted, that the doctrine of Chriſt's ſatisfaction for ſin overthrows the neceſſity of holineſs, and therefore reject it; as 'tis certain, they would have too much cauſe to do, were this its natural tendency; which is ſo far from being true, that there cannot be a more perſua-

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ſive argument for our forſaking all ſin, than that Chriſt, the Son of God, ſhed his blood to expiate it. It is impoſſible, indeed, but *offences will come, but woe unto thoſe men by whom the offence cometh.* And need I point them out? Muſt not the conſcience of every wilful ſinner, of every one that indulges his luſts, and yet will needs place his confidence in the righteouſneſs of Chriſt, tell him roundly, *Thou alſo art one of them?* 'Tis owing to thee, and others like thee, that the goſpel hath ſuffer'd ſuch contumelious Uſage.

I SHALL ſay no more of the ſeveral ways by which Chriſtians, indifferently, may offend againſt the precept in the text. But ſhall proceed,

IN the *ſecond place*, to explain this duty, of behaving ſo that our good be not evil ſpoken of, as it *particularly* affects *real* Chriſtians, or thoſe that *love the Lord Jeſus in ſincerity.* All ſuch are truly religious; this is eſſential to their character; and we know, that *pure undefil'd religion before God* is a *good* thing; the very *beſt* thing in the whole world. I am not now ſpeaking of religion as we find it in the Bible, where it ſhines, like the ſun in the heavens, with an everlaſting brightneſs; but as inwrought into the heart and ſoul. And here, religion is an aſſemblage, or ſociety of graces; lovely, if taken *apart*, moſt lovely and attractive conſider'd in *union.* Religion is a conformity to the divine

Nature, an imitation of God in his moral perfections; that is, of the moſt amiable attributes of the moſt amiable and glorious Being. It was the happineſs of man, in his firſt and beſt eſtate, that he was created in the likeneſs of God, and conſequently, it muſt be a ſingular felicity to have this image or likeneſs reſtor'd, as it is in all the regenerate; tho' not in that perfection as it will be hereafter. The life of God in the ſoul, a vigorous principle of divine love, a rooted confirm'd habit of holineſs, an unaffected piety and goodneſs, an inclination to univerſal righteouſneſs, a heavenly converſation; theſe are ſuch things as no one will offer to ſpeak againſt *directly*; the worſt and moſt abandon'd part of mankind would be aſham'd to vent their hatred and ſpite in reproaches againſt theſe things themſelves; and yet, they will with the greateſt freedom inveigh againſt the perſons in whom they are found. What the ſcripture calls *converſion*, *regeneration*, *grace*, *ſanctification*, *religion*, and the like, they call, almoſt whereſoever they ſee it, folly, paſſion, ill nature, hypocriſy, enthuſiaſm, ſuperſtition, pride, moroſeneſs, and by a great many other ſuch reproachful names. And how comes religion to be thus evil ſpoken of? is the *beſt* of things to ſuffer under ſome of the *worſt* of names? eſpecially, when it hath a witneſs in every man's breaſt? We ſhall not miſtake, if we ſay, that the root of this is *the enmity of the carnal mind againſt God*; which, becauſe it dares

dares not aim immediately at God himſelf, diſplays its rancour in perſecuting his image, by *actions*, if they are in its power; if not, by opprobrious *words*. But then, I muſt add, that good men themſelves do too often afford a handle for this treatment, which would otherwiſe be ſo apparently the effect of envy and malice, that ill men would not ſo very often be guilty of it. There are ſome, who we have reaſon to think are in the main upright, well-meaning Chriſtians, that labour under conſiderable imperfections, which, tho' they do not make them forfeit their covenant-relation to God, and intereſt in him, have yet a moſt unhappy influence upon their character in the world. Theſe the enemies of godlineſs gladly ſeize upon, and immediately to work they go, and make the moſt of them they poſſibly can, aggravating every ſlip, expoſing every weakneſs, magnifying every defect; while they continue wilfully blind to thoſe virtues which are intermingled with their blemiſhes, and, with a good-natur'd and equitable judge, would compenſate for them all. As a bad man is a ſpot in a publick ſociety of Chriſtians, ſo there are certain qualities and imperfections which are ſpots in the true Chriſtian, and do very much ſtain, or hide, the beauty of his character. I ſhall reduce them under theſe four general heads, ſome things that ſavour a little too much of ſuperſtition and enthuſiaſm; indiſcretions; blemiſhes

miſhes of a moral kind in their private conduct; and, laſtly, defects in the ſocial virtues.

§. 1. THERE are ſometimes found in good men certain things, which ſavour too much of *ſuperſtition* and *enthuſiaſm*. Theſe ſpread ſuch a cloud over their religion, that the brightneſs of it cannot appear. Their friends, who have any thing of judgment and reflection, pity them for theſe weakneſſes, and are heartily griev'd for the prejudice they do the cauſe of religion; while their enemies deſpiſe them, and their religion too, and, having ſuch an advantage given them, inſult *both* in the moſt ſcornful manner. When ſuperſtition is mix'd with religion; the almoſt unavoidable conſequence is, that religion ſhall be accounted, or at leaſt treated, as ſuperſtition. Whatever diſcovers a belief of God, and of ſuperior inviſible beings; but dark, and confus'd, and join'd with abſurd, extravagant, and ridiculous obſervances, altogether unworthy of God, unſuitable to his worſhip, and unbecoming that truſt which we ought to repoſe in him, I call *ſuperſtition*. Tho' real Chriſtians (among us at leaſt) can hardly fall into ſuch groſs ſuperſtitions as gave beginning to *Atheiſm* and *Mahometiſm*, yet there are leſſer inſtances of the ſame temper, to which they are ſubject, and that have a bad effect on religion, tho' not ſo bad as the former. Such as theſe following.

1. HAVING

1. HAVING recourſe to ſpells, and charms, and divinations, for the cure of bodily diſeaſes, the diſcovery of things loſt, or future; paying a mighty regard to omens; the obſervation of lucky, and unlucky days, and places; and the like. Superſtition hath been the fruitful mother of many ſuch idle practices, which Chriſtians, for the credit of their religion, not to ſay of their own underſtandings, ſhould carefully avoid. All theſe things are among the relicks of popery; we receiv'd them from the *papiſts*, and they from the *heathens*; ſo that, if we trace them up to the beginning, we ſhall find that, on the father's ſide, the devil was the parent and inventor of them; and that theſe were ſome of the arts of his government, by which he kept mankind in bondage, ſtifled all ſober rational ſenſe of religion, and led the deluded world in chains of ignorance to their own perdition. And therefore, were there no other argument that lay againſt them, yet for the *Author*'s ſake, we ſhould *have no fellowſhip with theſe unfruitful works of darkneſs*. We may well call them *unfruitful*, for what fruit have we in them, but ſhame and ſorrow? Shame, when we are made ſenſible of the folly of them; or ſorrow and perplexity, as long as we continue to give them credit. We are told by *Maimonides*, a learned Jew, that the application of any thing, or the uſe of any rite, for the production of any effect in plants, or bodies, where reaſon cannot diſcover the

the leaſt ſhadow of a natural connection between the cauſe and the effects, their maſters us'd to ſtyle, *the way of the Ammorites*; which they thought to be forbidden *Levit.* xviii. 3. *after the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, ſhall ye not do; and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, ſhall ye not do, neither ſhall ye walk in their ordinances.* As for *Omens*[h], there is nothing ſo trivial, but a fancy, this way turn'd, will make it to be ominous; and as ſuperſtitious tempers are commonly fearful, the moſt ſlight occurrences, whether waking, or in our dreams, are receiv'd as meſſengers loaded with evil tidings. Such perſons, indeed, are always in a dream, and fright themſelves with their own imaginations, which have as little foundation in the reaſon of things, as thoſe terrifying viſions which fancy ſets before us in ſleep. By an endeavour to know *futurities*, we pry into things which God hath decreed to keep conceal'd. And, when *ſecret things belong unto God*, what arrogance is it in us to attempt to wreſt the knowledge of them from him? and what folly to think that, what God hides, any of his creatures ſhould be able to divulge? All nature muſt be ſilent, unleſs when inſtructed by the Author of nature to ſpeak his mind. Nor are theſe things ſo harmleſs as may be imagin'd, being plainly enough included in

[h] Vide *Spencer of Prodigies.*

that

that prohibition; which cannot be merely temporary, because not founded in reasons that are so, *Levit.* xix. 26. *Ye shall not use inchantment, nor observe times*; where the Hebrew word for using inchantment is thought likewise to import taking omens from the accidents that happen to us, as from sneezing, overturning the salt, from breaking the shoe-latchet, and such like things. And again, *Deut.* xviii. 10. *There shall not be found among you any one that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an inchanter*; that is, saith *Munster*, any one who enquires by signs or lots, whether it be proper to enter on a journey, or to begin an undertaking, as by the falling of a staff, this way or that, the opening of a book on such and such words; and many other things of the same nature, which might be mentioned. And the word which we translate an *inchanter* forbids the seeking the knowledge of any thing future by a curious attendance to any singular and unusual occurrence in common life. 'Tis to be lamented that persons of a sober character should countenance these idle and groundless usages; to say no worse of them; which are of much the same species as those of which we have a solemn renunciation, *Acts* xix. 18, 19. *And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many also of them that used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men*, &c. The Christian church found it necessary to condemn them;

and the fathers of the church inveigh'd warmly againſt them; particularly, againſt what we may call *magical phyſick*, or the art of curing diſeaſes by charms and amulets; tho' they ſometimes ſeem to have diſliked them as they were *pagan*, more than as they were *ſuperſtitious*; ſubſtituting Chriſtian ſpells in the room of thoſe us'd by the heathens. For what is the believer's ſigning himſelf with the ſign of the croſs better, ſaying this is my armour, this my medicament, which one of the fathers gravely recommends? In ſhort, to be influenced and governed by theſe ſuperſtitious imaginations, as ſome are, making them their rule, and building the quiet of their lives upon them, argues a weakneſs of mind, and makes others think leſs worthily of their *devotion*, for this very reaſon, as if that too were the effect of weakneſs and timidity. Let it be ſeen, that we are free from thoſe vain terrors, that the *ſcriptures* are our rule in matters of a religious concern, and our *reaſon* and prudence in other things. Our *reaſon*, I ſay, and not our *imagination*, or *vulgar traditions*; that we have a firm belief of the providence of God, and with a perfect compoſure of ſoul can truſt our ſelves and our affairs to its direction, neither amuſing nor affrighting ourſelves about things that have no foundation in reaſon, and muſt therefore be confeſs'd to owe all their authority to a ſuperſtitious fancy. Would Chriſtians ſhew themſelves to be men, and ſhake off the yoke

that

that ſuperſtition hath laid upon them in theſe, and other, inſtances, they would ſoon recover a part of that reputation which religion thro' their means hath loſt.

2. ANOTHER inſtance of ſuperſtition is laying a great deal of ſtreſs upon little things. I ſpeak not this to diſſuade any from a regard to the *leaſt* things which they apprehend to be a part of religion. I do not counſel them to deſpiſe them, becauſe they are *comparatively* little. But then, they ſhould have a care how they make them a part of religion without good reaſon; and if they have reaſon to judge them ſo, ſhould not therefore look upon them as of the eſſence of religion, and of the utmoſt moment in it. The *Phariſees* would have been ſuperſtitious in *tithing mint, aniſe, and cummin*, altho' they had not neglected the *weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth*, ſuppoſing they had been as zealous for the one as for the other, and made them to belong equally to the foundations of religion. Are there not ſome among the truly devout, that are fond of ceremonies to a degree of ſuperſtition? and others, who, to avoid this ſort of ſuperſtition, run into another, by placing too much in the forbearance of all forms and ceremonies in the worſhip of God? Of each ſide men are not contented to think their own way the moſt perfect; but they would fain have the things about which they differ accounted matters of the laſt importance,

and can hardly have charity for one another, or allow that God may have a favour for any but thoſe of their own opinion. Some are ſo attached to a ſet of words and phraſes, that all ſhall be deem'd enemies to the doctrines of Chriſtianity, who do not agree to expreſs them exactly in the ſame manner they do. Perhaps, they are words of human invention, the terms of a party, not of ſcripture, but being conſecrated by time, they have a kind of religious veneration for them, and becauſe they have been accuſtomed to them from their infancy cannot forbear making them a teſt of every one's ſoundneſs in the faith. Or ſuppoſing them to be taken from ſcripture, yet they may be miſapplied, as to the meaning which they affix to them, or may be obſcure and doubtful; for which reaſon, it cannot be unlawful, and may be expedient, in ſome caſes, to make uſe of others; ſince it is not at all credible that God hath confin'd us to the uſe of any words, when there is a manifeſt neceſſity that we ſhould ſometimes make uſe of other words to explain thoſe of ſcripture. How common is it for perſons to value themſelves upon their non-compliance with the innocent cuſtoms of the world, in their habit and language; as if good breeding, and civility of manners broke in upon one or more of the ten commandments, and they ſhould pleaſe God by being contrary to all other men? While others, forgetting what our

our Saviour hath ſaid, that *nothing which enters into a man defileth him* [i]; and one of his apoſtles, that *every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refuſed, if received with thankſgiving* [k]; have the ſame abhorrence for *things ſtrangled and blood*, as for the greater crimes mentioned together with them; not conſidering the difference in circumſtances between us and the Chriſtians of that time; and that, even then, the apoſtles were far from putting *fornication*, and eating *things ſtrangled* [l], on the ſame foot of unlawfulneſs; and the Chriſtians, for whoſe ſake they made this decree, as far from ſo underſtanding them. The great things of religion, the plain uncontroverted precepts are not a few, according to that of the Pſalmiſt, *thy commandment is exceeding broad* [m]; and theſe are the things in which Chriſtians ſhould exerciſe themſelves, and endeavour to excell. And as for leſſer things, which they conceive to fall under a divine command, tho' they ought not to overlook them, or *break the leaſt of God's commandments*, yet ſhould they not ſtrive for thoſe diſputable things, as for others that are on all hands agreed to be of very high moment and conſequence. They who thus confound great things and little, plain and diſputable, would do well to conſider thoſe words of the apoſtle *Paul*, 1 *Cor.* viii. 8. *Meat commendeth*

[i] *Mark* vii. 15. [k] 1 *Tim.* iv. 4.
[l] *Acts* xv. 20. [m] *Pſ.* cxix. 96.

as

us not to God; for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. 'Tis worth our obſervation, that the ſame apoſtle ſaith this, who, in another place, tells us, *he that doubteth is damned if he eat,* or rather is *condemned,* of himſelf, in doing what he cannot juſtify to his own conſcience, *Rom.* xiv. 23. From which two Places laid together we may form this rule; that tho' we muſt exactly follow the perſuaſions of conſcience, in the moſt minute things, yet we muſt not imagine that theſe minuter things, in which good men themſelves differ, are thoſe that chiefly recommend us to the favour of God: We muſt not imagine, that we are really the better for them, or Chriſtians, otherwiſe minded, the worſe, for not obſerving them. By bickering for leſſer things with as much earneſtneſs as for great, the profeſſors of the goſpel teach the enemies of it to eſteem the great things of religion as little. And, indeed, there is ſome danger that they themſelves, if they happen to be convinced of their miſtake, may go farther than they ſhould, and, together with little things, be tempted to lay aſide others that are greater, ſuppoſing, that they may have been deceived in theſe latter, as well as in the former.

3. WERE there the like occaſion for it among us, as among ſome Chriſtians, I ſhould inſtance in mens practiſing unneceſſary, and even hurtful rigours, as one of the bitter fruits of ſuperſtition.

perſtition. I ſhould take notice of their emaciating the body, ſo as to render it more like the body of one whom God hath viſited with ſome ſore diſtemper, making his beauty to conſume away like a moth, than of a perſon in health; of their ſcourgings, and other voluntary penances, forbearing all food for a long while together, and making it a point of conſcience not to allow themſelves in the uſe of any food that is pleaſant. I might argue with them on the unreaſonableneſs of ſuch ſeverities, ſince that can never be a duty which unfits us for other duties, nor can we at the ſame time be obliged to ſerve God with our bodies as well as our ſouls, and to uſe our bodies ſo hardly that they ſhall be diſabled for this ſervice. I might mind them, that this is being *righteous over-much*, and is often practis'd to compenſate for being *over-much wicked* in other reſpects; a mortified countenance not always arguing a mortified heart, and well-diſciplin'd paſſions; nor a ſhew of poverty in the life, true poverty of ſpirit. I might obſerve, that ſuch auſterities, inſtead of miniſtring to devotion, extinguiſh the very life and ſpirit of it, by depreſſing the mind together with the body; that they have an ill effect on the tempers of men, to make them moroſe, and ſour, and uncharitable; that they reproach the goodneſs of God, preſent the world with a falſe idea of him, contradict that of the apoſtle, that *God hath given us all things richly to enjoy*, and proceed on an utter miſtake

miſtake of religion, the *inſtrumental* duties of which are, by them, ſet in the firſt place, and the *means* prefer'd to the *end*. Theſe, I ſay, are ſome of the conſiderations, upon which I ſhould enlarge, were I to ſpeak in ſome places, and before ſome perſons. But, alas! I doubt, there is but little occaſion, among us, for admoniſhing men to ſpare themſelves; they do it ſure enough, and more than enough, without being adviſed to it. We ſeldom ſee among thoſe who make conſcience of their ways any who carry the duty of mortification too far; it would be well if they carried it ſo far as they ſhould. However, it may not be amiſs to have juſt mention'd theſe things, that if any ſhould be inclin'd to hearken to the dictates of ſuperſtition, and to practiſe ſelf-denials which God hath not commanded, (*which things*, indeed, *have a ſhew of wiſdom in will-worſhip, and humility, and neglecting*, or pinching, *the body*) or to queſtion their own ſincerity, or that of other Chriſtians; becauſe they do not live a life of ſuch extreme mortification, they may by recollecting the little I have now ſaid, and purſuing it in their own thoughts, be convinced that ſuperſtition is at the bottom of ſuch opinions and practices, and that by giving way to them they ſhall but make their religion as lank and pining as their bodies, and provoke thoſe that are no friends to ſerious godlineſs to brand it with the infamous name of ſuperſtition. The method in which we ſhall moſt

conſult

conſult our own comfort, and the credit of religion, is by a ſober, temperate uſe of bodily refreſhments, join'd with ſuch occaſional ſelf-denials, as conſcience perſuades, and prudence regulates; by means of which the ſoul is preſerved in greater vigour, and hath at once a freer enjoyment of itſelf, and more abſolute command over the body. The great deſign of all the duties, and inſtitutions of religion, is to purify and exalt the ſpiritual part of man, to leſſen the temptations of the fleſhly part, and aſſiſt him in ſubduing them, to mortify ſin, and to invigorate and ſtrengthen gracious principles, to render men uſeful in this world, and to fit them for a better. And this being the great deſign of religion, ſuch a treatment of the body, and ſuch meaſures in regard of its enjoyments, are moſt adviſable, as beſt anſwer this deſign. And when mortification is thus conducted, it will be a virtue that no good Chriſtian need be aſham'd of.

4. THERE is more ſuperſtition, than ſome good people are aware of, in indulging to a gloomy, melancholy temper, from a miſapprehenſion, that it is moſt agreeable to religion, and what God moſt delights in. Theſe are your religious perſons (will the world ſay); their religion hath made them mad; or they were half mad before, and that hath made them religious. Theſe are the *ways of wiſdom*, as they will have it; and *of pleaſantneſs and peace*, in which thoſe that travel are utter ſtrangers to pleaſure, mere

mopes, and ſtatues. For the ſake of *religion*, therefore, if not for their *own*, ſuch dejected Chriſtians ſhould labour after a more ſerene and chearful habit of mind. What father would like to ſee his children, or what maſter his ſervants, go up and down, all the day long, penſive and mourning, as the manner is of ſome Chriſtians? Would not perſons unacquainted with the parent or maſter, in ſuch a caſe, be ready to take up hard thoughts of them, and to pity thoſe under their government? As ſorrow is not the only paſſion belonging to the nature of man, ſo neither is it the only one that belongs to religion. There is ſuch an affection as joy, and ſuch a duty as praiſe and thankſgiving; (elſe, why are we commanded, *always*, and *in every thing to give thanks?*) And how this duty can be perform'd, as it ought to be, without this affection, I am not able to conceive. The ſame temper that diſpoſeth for the exerciſes of praiſe and love and gratitude, which ought to be ſome of the chief and moſt conſtant employments of the Chriſtian, muſt, I am ſure, diſpoſe him for a calm and pleaſing enjoyment of himſelf, and of every thing elſe that can contribute to the true happineſs of life. Nay, joy is not only what the Chriſtian is obliged to, as 'tis the ground-work of praiſe; but is itſelf a diſtinct duty, and founded on a diſtinct command, 1 *Theſſ.* v. 16. *Rejoice evermore.* This joy, rightly explain'd, doth not refuſe for its companion that

godly

godly ſorrow for ſin, which both by our bleſſed Lord himſelf, and by his apoſtle hath the greateſt encomiums beſtow'd upon it. On the contrary, mourning for ſin, whether at the firſt entrance on the Chriſtian life, or in the progreſs of it, beſides the ſatisfaction immediately accompanying it, is the great foundation of the pleaſure which aſſurance brings with it, and of joy in God, through our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, by whom alſo we receive the atonement. Such a joy, as this I am pleading for, renders religion more natural and agreable to the religious perſon himſelf, and more amiable to the beholder. An air and deportment, that ſhew a man to be eaſy in himſelf, and ſeldom fail of attending on a good conſcience, where it is not under the reſtraint of wrong principles, will be moſt likely to gain converts to godlineſs; while the contrary demeanour, at the ſame time that it betrays a ſuperſtitious and ſervile dread of the divine Being, will be apt to drive all but ſuch as are of a ſorrowful ſpirit from a way of life, that appears ſo diſmal and unentertaining. According to the *Jewiſh maſters*, a chearful compos'd frame of ſoul was one qualification for the *ſpirit of prophecy*; and is it not a very natural reflection which hath been made on this occaſion, that what was a qualification for the *ſpirit of prophecy* cannot well be thought inconſiſtent with the *ſpirit of holineſs*? The fruit of the Spirit is not only love, but peace and joy; which bleſſed fruit we can-

not expect he ſhould produce in us, as long as we do all that we are able to unfit ourſelves for it, and refuſe to be comforted. I will conclude this particular with obſerving, that an innocent pleaſantneſs equally remote from a *light*, *frothy* carriage, and a *ſtupid*, or *pining*, or *ſullen* melancholy, is what every Chriſtian ſhould ſtrive to attain to, being in itſelf greatly deſirable, and having a moſt friendly influence on our religion, both in the ſpeculation, and practice; preſerving the *ſoundneſs of the judgment*, which will be one means of ſecuring us from error, and making us more ſtrong, and active, and vigorous, in the diſcharge of our duty.

5. SHALL I propoſe it to be conſider'd, whether the notions commonly receiv'd of the Lord's-Supper do not border too much upon ſuperſtition? It is not my ſingle opinion that they do; but of perſons not leſs eminent for their ſerioufneſs and devotion, than for their knowledge in divine things. Indeed the nature of this inſtitution, as a *holy* feſtival, in which all preſent are ſuppos'd to have communion with one another, and *with all ſaints*, by mutual love, and with Jeſus Chriſt, their common Lord and Head, by the participation of his Spirit, and by a living faith; together with that direction of the *Apoſtle*, that a man *examine himſelf*, and then eat of this bread and drink of this cup; theſe, I ſay, with ſome other arguments, that are well enough known, ſeem to reſtrain the right of communi-

cating

cating to ſuch as make a credible profeſſion of Chriſtianity. For what have ſcandalous ſinners, the openly looſe and prophane, whom the *Apoſtle Paul* pronounces *the enemies of the croſs of Chriſt* Phil. iii. 18. to do, to meddle with an ordinance dedicated to the memory of this crucified Saviour, and intended for the peculiar conſolation of his faithful friends and diſciples? But ſtill, as this ſacrament hath the name of a *feaſt*, 1 *Cor.* v. 8. tho' a feaſt to which none beſides a ſelect company are to be admitted; may we not carry our reverence for it *too far?* or rather, may we not miſtake in the *nature* of the reverence that we pay it? and is not this actually the caſe, as often as a ſecret terror poſſeſſeth us, in our approaches to it, and while we are receiving? incapacitating us for that holy delight in God, and cordial taſte of his goodneſs, that confidence in the merits of Chriſt, that chearfulneſs in his ſervice, that flow of grateful affection on the remembrance of his dying love, and joyful expectation of his glorious appearance, which ſhould ever accompany this bleſſed ſolemnity? In the primitive church, the *Lord's-Supper* return'd as often as the *Lord's-day*; and the ſame writers, by whom we are inform'd of this, tell us farther, that the more devout had their *daily communions*. But as the ſpirit of piety decay'd, a falſe veneration for the ordinances of Chriſt was ſet up in the room of it; and that was made a mark of the church's mighty regard for an or-

dinance ſhe had receiv'd from her Saviour, (I mean the *unfrequency* of celebrating it) which really proceeded at firſt from the declenſion of her love to him, and zeal for his memory. What is it keeps ſo many from the Lord's Table, who want not an inclination to come to it, nor, as charity would judge, the qualifications requir'd to worthy receiving? What makes others ſcrupulouſly abſent themſelves, if they have been *hinder'd by the providence of God* from ſpending the uſual time in the exereiſes, of the cloſet and the church, that are preparatory to it? What is the reaſon of all this, but a wrong notion of this ſacrament, as if it was of a nature ſo much more ſacred and awful than the other inſtitutions of religion, that people had better entirely neglect a plain and acknowledg'd command of their Saviour than run the leaſt hazard of not obſerving it in the moſt worthy manner; and occaſionally loſe an opportunity of *ſhewing forth the death of Chriſt*, (tho' every ſuch opportunity be *precious*, and may, for ought they know, be the *laſt*, and tho' in the temper and habit of their ſouls they are prepar'd) than omit, without any fault of their own, thoſe rules of preparation which they have laid down to themſelves? To the ſame leaven of ſuperſtition, I doubt, we are in part to aſcribe thoſe unſcriptural terms which have been impos'd in admiſſion of church-members; as for inſtance, receiving in ſuch a particular poſture, and no other; laying before the church an account

count of thoſe experiences which the perſons preſenting themſelves for communion have had of a work of grace on their ſouls; that is, in ſhort, doing things for which the impoſers are not able to produce either the command or example of our Lord. The reaſon is, that out of their extraordinary reſpect for this ordinance, they are willing to do more to raiſe people's eſteem of it, and to fence and guard it againſt intruders, than the Law-giver himſelf hath ſeen fit to do.

6. ASCRIBING to the Spirit of God what doth not belong to him, and is altogether unworthy of him, is a practice of very bad conſequence. This is proper *enthuſiaſm*, when men miſtake the workings of their own minds, and even of their fancies and paſſions, for the immediate and extraordinary operations of the divine Spirit. True, but weak, Chriſtians, ſuch as have little judgment, or whoſe imaginations are too ſtrong for it, are moſt liable to fall into this ſnare; eſpecially, if they have a more than ordinary degree of pride in their natural temper, and this pride hath been cheriſh'd by falſe notions inſtill'd into them in their education. There is, without all doubt, ſuch a thing as divine aſſiſtance, to which every good man may ſafely lay claim, particularly, in the duty of prayer. *Rom.* viii. 26, 27. *Likewiſe the Spirit alſo helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we ſhould pray for as we ought: but the Spirit*

Spirit itſelf maketh interceſſion for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that ſearcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, becauſe he maketh interceſſion for the ſaints according to the will of God. However, ſome have taken the liberty, very indecently, (that I may not ſay, profanely) to ridicule the phraſe of *praying by the Spirit*, I can ſee nothing improper in it, if underſtood in a qualified ſenſe, which I apprehend to be the ſenſe of it in the 20*th verſe* of *Jude*'s Epiſtle; *praying in*, or by, *the Holy Ghoſt.* He is ſtiled the *Spirit of prayer and ſupplication*; this is one great part of his office, to direct the people of God in framing thoſe requeſts, for which the *Son*, as Mediator, procures a gracious audience. He irradiates the darkened mind, kindles and fans the holy fire; he fixes the attention, unites the heart, excites and maintains devout affections; nay, there is reaſon to believe, he ſometimes doth more than all this; my meaning is, that he brings things to remembrance which the Chriſtian might otherwiſe forget, and leads the ſoul into a train of pious thoughts and meditations. Yet after all, we cannot be certain when he doth this; theſe operations of the Spirit not being eaſily diſtinguiſhable from thoſe of our own rational faculties, which he imperceptibly guides, and influences. And, when he doth it, 'tis not to encourage our ſloth, but our diligence, and by way of bleſſing on our own previous endeavours. In every

every age of the church ſuch a diſpenſation of the Spirit as this may be allow'd. Whether any thing more can, I very much queſtion. I do not find the ſcripture affords us any ground to look for it. And yet, ſome high-flown profeſſors will talk in ſuch a manner of their *praying*, and *preaching*, by the Spirit, as implies the ſame immediate and miraculous communication of his gifts, as that promis'd by our Saviour to his apoſtles, *Matth.* x. 19, 20. *When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye ſhall ſpeak: for it is not ye that ſpeak, but the Spirit of your Father which ſpeaketh in you.* When they are called to officiate in the church, or in more private meetings of their fellow Chriſtians, they would not be thought to diſparage the aſſiſtance of the Spirit ſo much as to premeditate, and ſo many times utter ſuch crude, unguarded, expreſſions (to ſay the leaſt of them) as have not only expoſed the way of *free* prayer to contempt, but occaſioned the making it a mark of fanaticiſm to talk much of the Spirit's aſſiſtance in prayer, or any other duty. Can ſober, underſtanding Chriſtians, that will give themſelves leave to think the matter over a little, ſuppoſe that the Spirit uſually dictates the particular thoughts, or at any time the very words and expreſſions? and this, without any preparation and care on our part? Should Chriſtians univerſally practiſe on ſuch a notion as this, what wild work would it ſoon make? how little to the edification of the moſt piouſly diſpos'd

would the offices of religion be perform'd? and how much to the ſcandal and offence of others? It is very probable, that among other miraculous gifts which God was pleaſed to beſtow on the Chriſtian Church in the beginning, this of prayer was one; and that the apoſtle *Paul* hath an eye to it, where he ſaith, 1 *Cor.* xiv. 15. *I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the underſtanding alſo.* To pray *with the Spirit*, was to pray by a ſupernatural inſpiration of the Spirit; as to pray *with the underſtanding*, was to exerciſe his own underſtanding in prayer, and to pray ſo that thoſe preſent might underſtand, and be profited by what was ſaid. But, ſince other miraculous gifts are ceaſed, I would fain know, on what foundation they build, who contend for the continuance of this. I am very free to acknowledge the *gift of prayer*, provided it be not ſtretch'd too far: as it certainly is, when it leaves little or no room for diſtinction between the prayers of gifted Chriſtians at the firſt planting of the goſpel, and now that the goſpel hath been eſtabliſhed for ſo many ages; and renders it needleſs to take any pains for our own improvement, to think or meditate before our prayers, or to follow any rule and method in them.——

So much for the *firſt head* of imperfections, conſiſting of ſuperſtitious and enthuſiaſtical weakneſſes.

§. 2.

§. 2. VERY good Chriſtians have their *indiſcretions*; and theſe ſuch, as, together with themſelves, to make their religion leſs honourably thought of, both in religious matters, and in their common affairs.

1. IN religious matters it were to be wiſh'd ſome good men would exerciſe more prudence than they do. Our divine Maſter, in his firſt miſſion of the diſciples, *Matth.* x. 16, 17, tells them, *Behold, I ſend you forth as ſheep in the midſt of wolves: be ye therefore wiſe as ſerpents, and harmleſs as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils, and ſcourge you in their ſynagogues.* If our Maſter himſelf be a proper judge, the characters of the dove and the ſerpent do very well agree together, and help out each other; notwithſtanding which, ſome by their conduct ſeem to declare themſelves of another opinion. With this counſel of our Saviour, we have the concurrence of his own practice and example, who, till his hour was come, would not put himſelf into the hands of his enemies, nor needleſsly provoke them by too direct and publick an avowal of his being the Meſſiah, or Chriſt. It can be no part of prudence, every body will own, for a man to run himſelf upon inconveniences, which he may honourably decline; and if it be no part of prudence, I ſhould think it is none of religion: ſince religion, which is a wiſe and reaſonable thing, can

never oblige us to any thing that is unreaſonable and fooliſh; and whether it be any better to invite ſufferings, when we are not called to them, and they will anſwer no valuable end, let any wiſe man judge. *Amos* v. 13. *The prudent will keep ſilence in that time, for it is an evil time.* The prophet thought that ſilence might ſometimes be in ſeaſon, and allows us to judge *that* ſuch a ſeaſon, when, through the iniquity of the times, we ſhall by ſpeaking do ourſelves more hurt, than we can propoſe to do others good. To thoſe who neglect this caution we may ſay in the words of the royal preacher, *Eccl.* vii. 16. *Be not righteous over-much, neither make thyſelf over-wiſe; why ſhould'ſt thou deſtroy thyſelf?* The advice of the Apoſtle ſhould never be forgotten, *Col.* iv. 5. *Walk in wiſdom towards them that are without, redeeming the time.* In your converſation with them, and demeanour towards them, you ſhould be cautious how you give them any advantage againſt you by doing things which the wiſe and conſiderate will forbear. And there is the ſame, or greater, reaſon why Chriſtians ſhould walk in wiſdom among *themſelves*; conſulting their common intereſt, and managing both themſelves, and whatever controverſies happen to ariſe among them, in ſuch a manner, as not to weaken and expoſe the cauſe they eſpouſe; that what is ſaid of *Jeruſalem* in a *literal* ſenſe may be true of them in a *moral*, *Pſ.* cxxii. 3. *Jeruſalem is builded as a city that is compact together.*

gether. Hath not our Saviour farther warned us againſt *throwing our pearl before ſwine, leſt they turn again and rent us?* Matth. vii. 6. Which piece of prudence we overlook, when we reprove and adviſe perſons, from whom we have no return to expect but hatred and ill language; as we are likewiſe guilty of great indiſcretion, when we ſcatter our reproofs and admonitions without any conſideration of time or place or manner, and talk religiouſly out of ſeaſon. 'Tis indeed very much to be lamented, that the duty of fraternal reproof is not more faithfully practis'd, and that uſeful and religious diſcourſe, ſuch as that recommended by the apoſtle, *Eph.* iv. 29. is become ſo unfaſhionable. This is very true, but will not juſtify an indiſcriminate uſe of theſe things: ſince the *wiſe man* hath obſerv'd, *there is a time for all things*; and 'tis the office of prudence to note and conſult that time. We ſhould never be guilty of a baſe and cowardly concealment of the truth, nor appear in any other garb than that of virtue and piety, in order to pleaſe the company, and be more conformable to the world; this would be an extreme of dangerous conſequence to ourſelves, as the other extreme, of making more ſhew than needs of our virtue and goodneſs, is diſſerviceable to the cauſe of religion, by provoking the envy and ſpite of ill men, or tempting them to cenſure us as proud and hypocritical, or as fantaſtical and ſilly.

2. RELIGION hath ſuffer'd by the imprudence of its followers in their ordinary conduct. There is an unlucky obſervation, (which, how true it is, I leave others to conſider) that the moſt skilful in their ſeveral trades and profeſſions are thoſe that are leaſt ſerious, and that your plain ſober honeſt men are commonly but indifferent artiſts. The ſimple in a religious ſenſe are charged with being the ſame in another that is not ſo creditable. 'Tis pity it ſhould be ſo; but ſo, I fear, it ſometimes is. How unaccountable is the management of too many as to their worldly buſineſs? They ſeem to have no notion of forecaſt and deſign, nor to act by any rule. They blunder on in the dark, act hand over head, and, unleſs it be in the plaineſt caſes, are continually making wrong ſteps, entangling and perplexing their affairs, and inſtead of advancing forward running backward; not for want of natural capacity, which they are not anſwerable for, but of a little more thought and conſideration. Certainly, when our Saviour tells us, that *the children of this world are in their generation wiſer than the children of light*, Luke xvi. 8. his deſign was not to diſcourage any from being wiſe with reſpect to this world as well as the other. *Chriſtian* prudence, 'tis true, demands the *firſt* place; and *moral* prudence the *ſecond*; but *ſecular* prudence may be allowed the third. We ſhould *ſeek firſt the kingdom of heaven*, and after that may mind other

other things. He that keeps a good conſcience cannot be too prudent in common matters. The beſt excuſe, for the indiſcretions and overſights of good men in worldly things, is, that they are ſo intent on their higher concerns as to neglect thoſe of a more trivial nature. They cannot at once be attentive to both. But why not? Induſtry in our worldly employments doth not claſh with diligence in the work of our ſalvation; the ſame ſcriptures, which command one, command both; which *they* may find it of uſe to conſider, who, to excuſe their not being ſo careful as they ſhould in their worldly callings, beſtow more time than ordinary on the immediate care of their ſouls. And why then ſhould *prudence* in one be any more inconſiſtent with *prudence* in the other? Yea, to how little purpoſe is induſtry in our common affairs without prudence? and how helpful is prudence in our common calling to the duties of our Chriſtian vocation? Pſal. cxii. 5. *A good man ſheweth favour and lendeth, he will guide his affairs with diſcretion.* By a prudent œconomy he will be able to maintain good works for neceſſary uſes. In the government of their families, the education of their children, their converſation in the world, their traffick and negotiations with others, they ſhould not only ſtudy to ſhew themſelves upright, (though this ſhould be their principal aim) but to be diſcreet too, that there may be no *colour* for that invidious reflection, that none but

but weak and ſhallow people are religious. —— This is the ſecond head of imperfections, which eclipſe the graces of God's people, and are the cauſe that their good is evil ſpoken of; namely their indiſcretions.

§. 3. THE next are blemiſhes, of a *moral kind*, in their *private* conduct. Obſerve, I ſay, *blemiſhes*, not groſs and eſſential errors, which will not ſtand with ſincerity.

1. SOME are not ſo conſtantly and exactly regular as they ought to be, who, I would yet hope, are in the number of God's children. The freedoms they take cannot be juſtified, they diſcover too great remains of ſenſuality. The carnal principle is not ſo throughly mortified, nor vitious inclinations ſo perfectly ſubdued; but that they ſometimes hurry them beyond the bounds of ſtrict temperance and decorum, to the endangering of their good name and reputation, if not of their ſouls. The uſe made of ſuch examples by wicked men is to harden themſelves in their evil courſes, and to pleaſe themſelves with a conceit, that tho' they are bad, yet not worſe, but rather better, conſidering all things, than thoſe who make greater pretenſions to piety. Where is the mighty difference (ſay they) between your godly people and us, ſaving that they ſet up for ſomething in religion when they are nothing, while we are willing to be known for what we are,

and ſo never trouble ourſelves to palliate our faults? In this, no doubt, they ſlander you; ſince, whatever they ſay, there muſt be a viſible difference between real Chriſtians that walk leaſt circumſpectly, and the vitious part of the world. But is not the charge ſo far true, that too many of thoſe who profeſs an eſteem for religion, and do ſincerely eſteem and love it, live too negligently, indulge to their fleſhly appetites more than becomes them, and drink more than they ſhould, tho' not more than they can bear; enough to enflame their paſſions, tho' not to extinguiſh their reaſon? They do not preſerve that juſt ſobriety, that guard upon their appetites, that moderation with reſpect to corporeal enjoyments, which Chriſtian decency requires: by which means they render themſelves leſs fit for divine converſes, and ſpiritual delights; and not only ſo, but lay a ſtumbling block in the way of others, and hurt, inſtead of edifying, them by their example. Ah! why will not profeſſors be perſuaded to greater caution and vigilance? they promiſe it from time to time; and why do they not perform, as well as promiſe and reſolve? Nature, before it is ſpoil'd by ill habits, is ſatisfied with little; let the world ſee that grace can enable you to be ſatisfied with leſs. Temperance is reckon'd among the fruits of the Spirit, *againſt which there is no law*, *Gal.* v. 23. There is no objection lies againſt this virtue, every body is ready

to praiſe and admire it in others; and where the power of godlineſs is, every body expects it. Indeed, temperance always goes along with godlineſs; the grace, that teaches one, teaches the other, *Tit.* ii. 12. but not always in that degree, which is neceſſary to make godlineſs appear with its proper brightneſs and ſplendor. Convince the world that you have better pleaſures, better in your own eſteem, than thoſe of eating and drinking, or any of the low and vulgar delights of ſenſe, for which you reſerve yourſelves, and, which that you may be more capable of reliſhing, you exerciſe abſtinence in others.

2. PASSIONS, not well-govern'd, are a great reproach to the perſon in whom they are obſerved; be he otherwiſe of never ſo great worth. Unguarded paſſions ruffle the ſoul, pervert the judgment, and obſcure the graces of the Spirit; ſo that they are like the lights of heaven in a ſtorm, which are hardly ſeen, or are no ſooner ſeen than they are again ſnatch'd from the view. Religion ſhews to great diſadvantage in ſuch a temper. What fooliſh things do wiſe and good men throw out in their paſſions? and ſometimes worſe than fooliſh? Their friends bluſh, their enemies laugh, their character ſuffers, and they, when they come to be cool, are heartily aſhamed to reflect on what they have ſaid and done. And reaſon enough they ſhould be ſo, to think that Chriſtians ſhould behave

themſelves ſo little like men; that they who have not only reaſon, but grace, to conquer their paſſions, ſhould, with this double guard and aſſiſtance, be overcome by them? To what purpoſe have men reaſon and grace, if they do not uſe them? Wherein doth the ſtrength of this divine principle, call'd *grace*, appear? Have not ſome by the ſingle force of moral wiſdom, and reſolution, done more towards the conqueſt of their paſſions, than theſe men with all the boaſted aids of grace? Thus, we muſt expect, the world will talk when we have opened their mouths. We cannot be ſurpriz'd if they employ the weapons we have put into their hands againſt religion; which becauſe it exerts but little power in us, at leaſt viſibly, will be concluded to have little or none in itſelf. O that Chriſtians would ſet themſelves to redeem the credit of divine grace, which they have ſo much wrong'd by their violent inordinate paſſions! Let the ſtrength of grace be ſeen by its being ſtronger than the ſtrongeſt of our paſſions. Otherwiſe, men will be ready to queſtion whether there is any ſuch thing; or, at beſt, whether we are poſſeſt of it. As, indeed, we ſhall have too much ground to queſtion it ourſelves. The government of the thoughts and paſſions is one of the beſt marks of a ſupernatural power and ability; the former to a man's ſelf, the latter both in regard of himſelf and others. There are other paſſions in which good men are ſub-

ject to excess, besides anger, and by excess in which they lessen and sully their character. To be lifted up with a little worldly success, or vex'd and put out of patience at a slight disappointment, to be transported with joy on small occasions, or plunged in grief, or held in suspence with restless hopes and fears; these are all of them arguments of a little mind, and commonly too of little grace. 'Tis strange, that they who have so much greater things to mind, and are convinced of their greatness, should be extremely mov'd and disorder'd by little ones. There is one thing, particularly, which I have been sorry to have been a witness to in some Christians, and which every one should watch against in himself; and that is a fretful, peevish, discontented humour. Have we gone no farther in Christianity than this? We have yet then one principal lesson to learn, which is that of contentment, whatever our condition and circumstances may be. It is the unhappy temper of some to be always complaining, μεμψίμοιροι *Jude* 16. finding fault with their lot and portion. I need not say, this is unbecoming a Christian, when it is so indecent in any reasonable creature. Like generous liquors that are turn'd sour, even the religion of such persons hath no pleasantness in it. O what an ornament is a meek, a quiet, and a contented spirit! it carries its own reward with it. Would we enjoy ourselves, or adorn our holy profession, let us exercise ourselves herein,

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to have our paſſions under controul, and obſequious to the dictates of reaſon and conſcience.

3. ANOTHER very great blemiſh is covetouſneſs, or the love of the world; which, tho' it never reigns in the regenerate, ſo as to be the predominant, determining principle, hath frequently too much power in them. The conteſt betwixt heavenly and earthly things is ſo far decided in every ſuch ſoul, that heavenly things are prefer'd; but then the preference is not ſo abſolute and entire as it might, and ſhould be. All ſincere Chriſtians ſet their affections *chiefly* on things above, but not *only*; ſo far, alas, from that, that the world keeps poſſeſſion of a conſiderable part, as the *Canaanites* did of the promiſed land after the children of *Iſrael* were ſettled in it. Were the matter to be brought to a final trial, they, who love Chriſt in the loweſt degree that is conſiſtent with ſincerity, would renounce all for his ſake. Ah! why ſhould not their love to their Redeemer be ſo ſuperlatively ſtrong as to diſcover its empire and dominion in every temptation, and in their moſt ordinary actions? not only by parting with the world, when they can no longer keep it with a good conſcience, but by uſing it aright while it is in their hands? by the moderation of their deſires after it, and their delight in it? There is a vaſt diverſity in mens natural tempers. Some are more generous, others more worldly; ſome deſpiſe riches, others are inclin'd to over-rate them.

Where

Where there is the former generous temper with the addition of God's grace, 'tis a moſt happy and ſuitable alliance; they promote one the other, and act with greater ſtrength and beauty becauſe they act conjointly. The heavenly life, in ſouls ſo refin'd, advances apace. It is not ordinarily ſo in the other niggardly temper. Here grace is ſo clog'd and fetter'd, that its operations are hardly diſcernible. The love of God, and the love of the world are in a perpetual ſtruggle. While one puſhes the Chriſtian forward, the other pulls him back; while one enlarges and raiſeth the mind, the other contracts and depreſſeth it: and the ſoul, having its wings thus entangled and clip'd, and its force and vigour abated, can take but ſhort flights towards heaven. Covetouſneſs diſgraces the moſt ſhining virtues, which, however extraordinary, are but little valued and regarded when joined with avarice; and quite conceals a common virtue. Could we but produce a good number of inſtances of thoſe whoſe tempers led them to be covetous, but were ſo very much changed and exalted by grace, that they could look down with contempt on things which they moſt admir'd and doated upon in their natural ſtate; never neglecting their duty becauſe it was expenſive, or venturing upon the commiſſion of a known ſin for any temptation the world could offer, and manifeſting a perfect coldneſs and indifference in the purſuit of temporal riches, when compar'd

par'd with the fervour of their deſires after things ſpiritual and divine: could we, I ſay, produce more examples of this kind; perſons that knew nothing of religion from their own experience would have a much greater idea of it than they now have, and be induced to believe it came from heaven by its raiſing men thither. How can we think of this, and not be concern'd to find ſuch inſtances ſo exceeding rare? and that, by this means, Chriſtianity hath but little reputation in the world, notwithſtanding the excellency of its precepts, and the ſublimity of its objects? The low groveling diſpoſition of thoſe, who pretend to be among its intimate acquaintance, is a conſiderable check to it. Wherefore, let all that go under the name of Chriſt's friends and diſciples impartially examine themſelves in this point, and, if they find their hearts in any degree captivated by worldly affections, oppoſe them to the utmoſt of their power, and be ſure not to do what will gratify and feed them. They ſhould think with themſelves, what judgment the world hath of them, and how great a ſlur their covetouſneſs puts on the graces of God's Spirit in them.

4. THE laſt blemiſh, I ſhall mention, in the private character of perſons, on other accounts very valuable, is their doing mean and diſhonourable things. Chriſtians, who know the things that are excellent, ſhould practiſe no other. Inſtead of which, there are thoſe who deſcend ſo much

much beneath their character, as to do things, which for their baſeneſs many unregenerate perſons, from a native ſenſe of honour and decency, would ſcorn to be guilty of. Now, methinks, 'tis pity that theſe two qualities of *goodneſs* and *greatneſs* of ſoul ſhould be ever found aſunder, when they would be ſuch a heightening to the lovelineſs of each other's appearance. I confeſs, all true greatneſs of ſoul implies goodneſs, and all goodneſs greatneſs; but beſides the greatneſs that is inſeparable from goodneſs, one would gladly ſee it united with ſuch a magnanimity, or greatneſs and elevation of heart, as would inſpire a man with a diſdain of little ill-favour'd actions. When the apoſtle would have us *provide things honeſt in the ſight of all men*, Rom. xii. 17. *to think of ſuch things*, Phil. iv. 8. *to walk honeſtly, as in the day*, Rom. xiii. 13. (which ſort of precepts do frequently occur in St. *Paul*'s Epiſtles) the original words have another meaning than what is commonly affix'd to the word *honeſt* in Engliſh; ſignifying what is *comely*, *decent*, *venerable*, and the like. Theſe are the things which the goſpel calls upon us to ſtudy and practiſe; and which they whoſe breaſts are thoroughly tinctur'd with its principles, and who have a clear diſcernment of the beauty and deformity, the dignity and meanneſs of actions, will not need many words to explain. Let us therefore avoid what hath a ſordid appearance, as well as the appearance of what is plainly evil.

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Let us *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called*; which we ſhall never do, in the due extent of that expreſſion, by keeping ourſelves from actions manifeſtly ſinful and diſhoneſt, unleſs we farther add an abhorrence of thoſe that are ſhuffling and ſneaking. Let me conſider, how will ſuch an action look? Is it of good report? Will it conciliate eſteem and love? or does it tend to make me contemptible? a jeſt and a by-word to others? to gain me the name of a narrow-ſoul'd, creeping, intereſted wretch? one of low views, and deſigns? of coarſe ſentiments? addicted to tricks and artifices? and deſtitute of all ideas of what is handſome and praiſeworthy, and of all ambition to excel in it? Let us not forget, that mean and baſe things are contrary to the *dignity* of the Chriſtian profeſſion, as well as things ſinful to the *holineſs* of it.—— I have now done with the third head of imperfections; being blemiſhes of a moral kind in the Chriſtian's more private conduct.

§. 4. THE diſciples of Chriſt expoſe their *good to be evil ſpoken of*, when they are remarkably deficient in the *ſocial virtues*. I mean not thoſe which are eſſential to ſociety, ſuch as juſtice, and veracity, (for theſe no true Chriſtian can want) but ſuch as contribute to its well-being. Of which ſort are theſe following.

1. *THE love of ſociety* being planted in our very nature, there is ſomewhat ſavage and unnatu-

ral in flying from it, and affecting a recluſe and ſolitary life. Solitude and ſociety, retirement and converſation, have, each of them, their advantages, and, when they take their turns, may yield as much comfort as profit. 'Tis too evident to be denied, that good company is hard to be met with. But, I would hope, there is ſome ſuch, or, at leaſt, ſome that is innocent; and, let it be but innocent, we ought not wholly to ſhun it. A wiſe man will find his account in it; nor ſhould a good man ſtand aloof from it, or think it his duty to behave himſelf in it with ſhineſs and reſerve. What conſtruction will people put upon ſuch an averſion to ſociety? Will they not be ready to attribute it to pride? or, if they do not reſolve it into pride, will they not derive it from ſome other cauſe, not much more for our credit? *Man* is a *ſociable being*; and I dare affirm, they are under a great miſtake who have a notion of the *new creature* as *otherwiſe* fram'd and inclin'd. Chriſtianity was not intended to deſtroy any one principle truly natural, but to refine and improve every principle and inclination of this kind. Let men have *humanity* at their converſion, and there is no great danger of their loſing it afterwards. *Evangelical virtue* is one of the moſt ſociable things in the whole world; as appears from this ſingle conſideration, that it hath none of the ſeeds of animoſity and diviſion in it, which vice abounds with. We may call it the *univerſal magnetiſm*

of minds that are in their proper and moſt natural ſtate, or that ſecret quality by which they draw and embrace each other. The idea the ſcripture gives us of heaven is that of a ſociety of pure and happy ſpirits; and tho' 'tis certain that none of our ſocieties here upon earth can compare with that perfect model, yet no one ought therefore to renounce them, any more than to renounce the thoughts of getting wiſdom and grace, becauſe, after all he can do, his attainments in both will be very incomplete. By ſecluding himſelf from human converſe, a man will but get himſelf an ill name without meeting in his retreat with any thing that will make him amends for it. 'Tis well, if he be not aſſaulted with temptations, which will be the more dangerous as they find him alone. There is ſomething in the preſence and company of Chriſtian friends that cheers and enlivens the heart, helps a man to throw off any load that may hang upon his ſpirits, and diſpoſeth him to travel on in the journey of life, and in his Chriſtian courſe, with more ſpeed and alacrity. At worſt, they that are fond of the life of hermits, and neither care to give or receive neighbourly and Chriſtian viſits, having no proſpect, as they think, of bettering themſelves by them, ſhould yet vouchſafe to aſſociate with others, in order to better them, and reſtore converſation to its proper uſe and deſign. ——— I would not be miſtaken, and therefore add, that *much company*,

or *company ill-choſen*, is worſe than *none*. When people are fond of cultivating a large acquaintance, perpetually taken up in entertaining or being entertain'd, in collecting and retailing news, rambling from place to place, from company to company, pleas'd to be any where rather than at home, employ'd about any thing rather than in the buſineſs to which they are call'd, and to converſe with any perſons rather than themſelves: not to mention the effect this muſt have on their temporal affairs, it is next to impoſſible they ſhould improve in their knowledge of God and their own hearts; or that the other world ſhould gain upon their affections, when their time is almoſt all devour'd by the pleaſures and avocations of this. And the conſequence is not leſs fatal from a *wrong choice* of company; when the vain, the looſe, the irreligious are, merely for their wit and humour, preſer'd to the wiſe and ſober. If a man carries any ſenſe of religion, and reliſh of its pleaſures, into ſuch converſation, it will not be long before he loſes it. For *he that walketh with wiſe men ſhall be wiſe, but a companion of fools ſhall be deſtroyed.*

2. 'Tis a virtue of ſociety to be *affable*, and *courteous*; and ſo is it of Chriſtianity too, 1 *Pet.* iii. 8. *be pitiful, be courteous.* And conſequently, a ſupercilious haughtineſs and ſtiffneſs of carriage, beſides its diſqualifying a man for ſociety, muſt argue him not to be ſo complete a Chriſtian as he ſhould be. Allowance muſt be made for

for temper, and inclination. In ſome, nature is more ſmooth and ductile; in others, more rough and unpoliſh'd. Creatures of different kinds ſcarce differ more remarkably from one another in this reſpect, while this is ſtately and ſullen, that tractable and gentle, than men do, tho' of the ſame ſpecies. However, tho' this may ſomewhat extenuate the matter, it will not amount to a juſtification. Other animals muſt retain the marks and characters which nature hath ſeverally ſtamp'd upon them; nor are they anſwerable for any of their imperfections, becauſe they cannot help them: while man hath ſo much power over his own mind, that he can, if he heartily endeavours it, cure himſelf of many of his infirmities; and, in lower inſtances, either alter or improve his nature. In lower inſtances, I ſay; as to which, by watchfulneſs over himſelf, and propoſing ſuch examples as are worthy of his imitation, he may, with time and cuſtom, ſuperinduce another nature more perfect than that which he brought into the world with him; as, by the grace of God, ſuch a change may be wrought upon him, as ſhall reſtore the image of God on his ſoul, and transform him into a new creature. Hear the apoſtle's advice to the *Romans*, chap. xii. ver. 16. *Be of the ſame mind one towards another; mind not high things, but condeſcend to men of low eſtate; be not wiſe in your own conceit.* That part of the advice, which more immediately falls in under this particular,

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is that condeſcending behaviour which he recommends to them: and 'tis obſervable how he places it; juſt before is the precept, *not to mind high things*; juſt after, *not to be wiſe in our own conceit*. Which may probably intimate to us the root and original of an imperious lofty temper. Men either *mind high things*, and ſo do not regard thoſe below them; or, *being wiſe in their own conceit*, they diſdain them. He that would be *affable* muſt be *humble*. By affability, I mean a man's being free and open to his equals, and civil and obliging to the meaneſt of his inferiors; not ſour and moroſe, not taking ſtate upon him, not carrying it as if he did not ſee or hear them, or thought it a diſparagement to beſtow a look or a word upon them: like thoſe of old, who fancied they ſhould be defil'd by mixing with the vulgar, to whom in their pride they would ſay, *Stand off, for I am holier than thou*; ſo theſe, Stand off, for I have more ſenſe, or wealth, or power than you have. Such a carriage is diſpleaſing in all, but doubly ſo in perſons of a religious character; who, being the diſciples of a meek and lowly Jeſus, give great offence to the world, when they ſhew themſelves in a guiſe ſo unlike their maſter. An unaffected ſweetneſs and civility of geſture and converſation, as it will cover great faults, ſo will it beautify and ſet off the meaneſt virtues, and render thoſe that are truly great more eminently bright and conſpicuous. When the maſter of a family, and ſuch as

bear

bear the greateſt ſway in a neighbourhood, are good men, and withal kind and gentle and eaſy of acceſs, it wonderfully endears them to thoſe in an inferior rank, and adds a much greater weight to their counſels, their reproofs, and examples. I need not add, if ſuperiors ſhould not be haughty and over-bearing to thoſe below them, inferiors ſhould not be rude and ill-manner'd to thoſe above them. Both theſe have a tincture of the ſame bad principle of pride and conceit: a quality which no advantage of fortune, no ſuperiority of gifts or ſtation, will obtain pardon for; but is moſt offenſive in perſons of a mean and indigent condition. And when ſuch as theſe, who ſhew that they neither underſtand themſelves, nor the rules of Chriſtianity, as they ſhould, and have no regard to the diſtinction which providence hath ſeen fit to make between men, ſhall ſet up for ſomething extraordinary in the church of God; 'tis well if a part of that diſpleaſure, which ſtanders-by muſt conceive againſt them, doth not fall upon their profeſſion.

3. ANOTHER ſocial virtue, and a great ornament to religion, is *a readineſs to put the beſt conſtruction upon the actions of others*; oppoſite to which is *cenſorioufneſs*; which, I have been griev'd to hear ſo often laid to the charge of religious people. I am perſuaded, the matter is not ſo bad as the world repreſents it, who frequently call every ſignification of a man's diſlike

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of the moſt open and ſcandalous faults by the name of cenſoriouſneſs. But ſtill, I doubt, the accuſation, tho' itſelf cenſorious in the main, is not without all ground. It is not the part of a good man to hunt after faults, eſpecially when they come not within his province to note and correct. To judge *raſhly* is but one remove from judging *falſely*. If the action hath a doubtful appearance, charity, which *thinketh no evil*, will incline to the more favourable ſide. The Chriſtian ſhould not love to rake into the characters of others, but leave ſuch dirty work to more proper hands, as a perſon well-bred would cleaning of the publick ſtreets. He ſhould not have his ear open to receive ill reports, much leſs his mouth to repeat them. Surely, no good man can delight in the ſins and miſcarriages of others: 'tis no ſign, or part, of his goodneſs, if he does; but a blot, and a reproach to him, that he ſhould be guilty of that which a good-natur'd man, with very little other goodneſs in him, would abhor. And what a man doth not delight in how can he be fond to hear? 'Tis a barbarous cuſtom, but too common, for people, when they are met together, to ſit down and divert themſelves with worrying the reputation of their neighbours; this is ſomewhat like the *heathen* cuſtom of expoſing men to the fury of wild beaſts for the entertainment of the ſpectators. Perſons of any judgment and knowledge can find other ways of ſpending their time, at once

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more innocent and inſtructive; and much more may Chriſtians, who ſhould rather take the part of advocates, where the caſe will admit of it, and repreſent both perſons and actions in the beſt light they will bear; ſhewing themſelves herein not unacquainted with that part of the deſcription of charity, that it *believeth all things*. Prudence will reſtrain a wiſe man from making free with other mens good names, and humanity an ingenuous good-temper'd man; and ſhould not charity and conſcience reſtrain the religious man? Hath he not ſins of his own to mortify, and to confeſs and be humble for before God? And do not the ſins of other men, where they come to his knowledge, challenge his compaſſion[n] for the guilty? I ſhall conclude with thoſe words of the apoſtle, which are better known than practis'd, *Tit.* iii. 2. *Put them in mind to ſpeak evil of no man.* Speak evil of no man, and hardly any man will ſpeak evil of you; this at leaſt is the ſureſt way not to have your *good evil ſpoken of.*

4. *A COMPLIANT behaviour* in innocent things is what every Chriſtian ſhould ſtudy, both as a member of religious, and civil ſociety. If every man will needs adhere to his own humour, and not be contented unleſs his way be followed, and his opinion take place; what agreement, or harmony can be expected? What endleſs diſ-

[n] 1 *Pet.* iii. 8. *Jude* 22.

putes muſt enſue? one man having the ſame right to inſiſt on his fancy, as another upon his. And thus, inſtead of joining amicably in purſuit of thoſe ends for which they enter into ſociety, they will ſpend a great part of their time and zeal in contending for ſuperiority one over another. Suppoſing a man to be wiſer than others of the ſame community, and that he hath a righter notion of ſome things; yet it is no part of his wiſdom to oppoſe his ſingle judgment to the general ſuffrage, and to go in a path by himſelf. For why ſhould a man be needleſsly ſingular? and draw on himſelf the imputation of pride, when he might avoid it? It is the moſt prudent way to bend, where a man lawfully may, and to ſubmit to the common deciſion. Perhaps, the majority err in their choice; perhaps, rules, and modes, and cuſtoms might be thought on more expedient than thoſe which are moſt prevailing, and have the publick vote; at leaſt, I fancy ſo. But what then? Shall I ſet up my judgment for the common ſtandard? and think to give laws to the greater number? 'Tis the apoſtle's advice, that we *ſubmit ourſelves one to another*, Eph. v. 21. And, ſince in every ſociety, this is abſolutely neceſſary, that ſome ſhould ſubmit to others; (ſince 'tis much if they have all to a man the ſame notions of things) which is fitteſt, that one or two ſhould ſubmit to a much greater number, or the much greater number to one or two? I hope, there is no

need of my telling you that I reſtrain this compliance to things lawful, or indifferent; not extending it to matters where conſcience interpoſeth; whoſe authority is always greater than that of any number or cuſtom whatſoever. *Daniel* ſeems at firſt ſight to have been guilty of an affected ſingularity, when he refus'd to take *the portion of meat and drink* which the King had *appointed him.* But the excuſe which he made for his refuſal, that he ſhould hereby *defile himſelf* [o], was not a mere pretence to hide his ill-humour and obſtinacy: but a very ſubſtantial one, proceeding on this ground, that it was the cuſtom with theſe nations to throw a part of the bread and wine on the altar; or, if they had no altar at hand, upon the fire or the hearth, inſtead of an altar; and that way to conſecrate to their Gods the whole of what they ſhould eat [p]. It was for this reaſon that he reckon'd the meat was defiled, and that he himſelf ſhould be ſo by eating it; it being a partaking with idols. Now, I have mention'd this cuſtom of the heathens, methinks, I would make one uſe of it, tho' a little out of my way, and that is, to reprove thoſe who go under the name of Chriſtians, and yet ſit down to their meals, and riſe up again, without begging a bleſſing upon what they are to receive, or returning thanks for what the bountiful hand of Providence hath given them.

[o] *Dan.* i. 8. [p] *Grot. in loc.*

The miſtaken piety of heathens, who thus acknowledg'd their falſe gods at their tables, is a ſevere reprimand to Chriſtians for their neglect of the true God. Near akin to this laſt, is

5. *PEACEABLENESS*; a virtue of ſociety, which no Chriſtian ſhould be defective in, or can be ſo, without injury to religion. We are charged, *if it be poſſible, and as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men*, Rom. xii. 18. *To make ſupplications, prayers, and interceſſions for all men*, more eſpecially *for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godlineſs and honeſty*, 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2. Now it would be very odd, for the ſame men to pray for the publick peace, and at the ſame time to break it by an unquiet turbulent behaviour, or by ſeditious words and practices, *ſpeaking evil of dignities*, and doing things which they know to be offenſive to the higher powers. Chriſtians, in their ſeveral places, ſhould *ſtudy to be quiet, and to do their own buſineſs*, 1 Theſſ. iv. 11. that they may not *ſuffer as buſy-bodies in other mens matters*, 1 Pet. iv. 15. endeavouring to promote peace, as far as they have any influence in families, or neighbourhood, or greater communities; not given to emulations, wrath, ſtrife, contention, which are all of them *works of the fleſh*, *Gal.* v. 20. not quarrelſome and litigious; but, for peace ſake, receding from what they are perſuaded is their right in leſſer things: of which we have an example in *Abraham*, Gen. xiii. 9.

who,

who, tho' he was *Lot*'s uncle, and, in that relation, had a juſt claim to the precedency, yet to prevent all ſtrife between himſelf and his nephew, and between their herdſmen, lets him have the firſt choice where to ſettle in the land. And thus a greater than *Abraham*, I mean our *bleſſed Lord*, tho' not obliged to pay tribute for the ſervice of the temple, would yet do it, to avoid *giving offence*, Matth. xvii. 27. It is obſerv'd of *the wiſdom that is from above*, that it is not only *pure* but *peaceable*. We are therefore to be peaceable as well as pure; and the rather, becauſe peaceableneſs is a point of heavenly wiſdom. A peaceable demeanour gains us the eſteem and affection of thoſe that know us, reflects an honour on our profeſſion, and puts us into a capacity of ſerving the cauſe we are embark'd in better than we could otherwiſe do. To add but one particular more,

6. THE virtue, that, above all others, makes any ſociety flouriſh, is *Benevolence* or good will. This virtue, which we commonly call *humanity*, is a principal part of Chriſtianity too. There is no other religion ſo fitted to inſpire and cheriſh this excellent temper, as the goſpel of our Saviour, by its principles, its precepts, and examples. In praiſe of benevolence, we may obſerve, that a perſon of this temper is emphatically ſtyled *the good man* [q], *for whom*, 'tis ſuppo-

[q] Ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ for *the* good man; not for *a* good man, as we have tranſlated it, becauſe it would probably then have been without the article, as ὑπὲρ δικαίου is in the ſame verſe.

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fed, there are *ſome* to be found, who *would even dare to die*, Rom. v. 7. We meet with the ſame title explain'd after the ſame manner in *Xenophon*[r], who tells us, that *Cyrus* was called by thoſe, whom he had ſuccour'd and befriended, *the benefactor*, *the good man*. Remember this, that *the good man*, by way of eminence, is the man of kind and friendly inclinations, the lover of his ſpecies, who hath a hearty concern for the welfare of all, and ſhuns no opportunities, that offer, of promoting it; whoſe breaſt is filled with none but affections of the beſt and nobleſt kind, ſuch as love, and thoſe other paſſions that branch out of it. Hatred he is a ſtranger to; he hath diſcarded envy, ill nature, and revenge; he allows them not any room in his heart; and, if he feels ſome ſudden motions of them on certain occaſions, (as what man is there exempted from all ſuch?) he ſtifles and ſuppreſſes them; and will not ſuffer them to break forth into his life, and diſtort and pervert the actions of that. This is the man, who, if there was occaſion, would be moſt likely to have others at his ſervice, not in a complement only, but in a time of need, ready to ſhare his dangers, and ſhield his life with the hazard of their own. A man can be no Chriſtian that is not in ſome

[r] *Cyri Inſtitut. lib.* 3. ἀναπαλοῦντες τὸν εὐεργέτην, τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν ἀγαθόν. This place gives great light to that of the apoſtle juſt mentioned, and the uſing the article in both is very remarkable.

meaſure

meaſure thus inclin'd; charity being one of the chief ingredients in a truly Chriſtian temper, the main feature in the image of the Son of God, to which we are to be conform'd: which, it were to be wiſh'd, ſome men would better conſider, who ſeem to have made up a Chriſtianity to themſelves in which love hath no ſhare; a Chriſtianity, that hath no heat or life belonging to it, but what it borrows from a bitter uncharitable zeal. The profeſſors of the goſpel ſhould be eminent in this virtue. Their charity ſhould ſhine before men, like the light of the ſun in the property of being unconfin'd; but as to its cheering and agreeable nature more like that of the heavenly city, *which hath no need of the ſun, or of the moon, to ſhine in it; becauſe the glory of the Lord doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.* Their hearts ſhould melt in tenderneſs and compaſſion, diffuſe themſelves abroad in good wiſhes, and be continually prompting them to acts of kindneſs and beneficence. They ſhould congratulate, not envy, another's proſperity; and condole, not rejoice, in his calamities; be quick to do a good office, and as ſlow to reſent a bad one done to themſelves. Nor muſt their benevolence be bounded within their own party; which is a *Jewiſh* not *Chriſtian* charity; but take the wideſt ſcope. Were this Godlike diſpoſition more conſpicuous in the generality of Chriſtians, what an honour would it be both to the Maſter, and to the diſciples!

And

And how would every one be perſuaded to believe that religion was a good thing, when they ſaw it to have ſo good an effect on the profeſſors of it, to render them kind, and amicable, and uſeful! —— I have now gone through the firſt thing propos'd; which was to explain and open the duty of taking care that our good be not evil ſpoken of; both as it relates to Chriſtians in general, and in a more particular manner to thoſe, who, in the judgment of charity, are really ſuch.

Secondly, I SHALL now proceed to prove and enforce the doctrine by ſome proper conſiderations. And that 'tis our duty and concern to exerciſe the greateſt care and caution in this matter is eaſily ſhewn.

1. THE firſt conſideration ſhall be taken from the world we live in. The people of the world look with an ill eye upon the people of God; almoſt all the cauſes of enmity concur that can ſet two people at variance, ſuch as difference of language, of maxims and opinions, of genius and inclinations, of manners and intereſts. Hence the enmity between the ſeed of the woman and the ſeed of the ſerpent is the moſt irreconcileable of any; being founded, beſides a contrariety of cuſtoms, in an oppoſition of natures too. Our Saviour hath inſtructed his diſciples what they are to expect from the world; telling them that *if they were of the world, the world would love them, but becauſe they were not of the world, but he*

he had choſen them out of the world, therefore the world hated them, John xv. 19. Now every diſciple of Chriſt ſhould make it his buſineſs to behave himſelf ſo prudently, and irreproachably, that the world, how much ſoever it hates them, may have no ground to deſpiſe them, nor any excuſe for its hatred; *having a good conſcience, that whereas* ill men would be glad to *ſpeak evil of them as of evil doers, they may be aſhamed that falſely accuſe their good converſation in Chriſt,* 1 *Pet.* iii. 16. *Jeremiah*'s complaint of ſome in his time, that they *watch'd for his halting.* Jer. xx. 10. is verified of good men in every age, more or leſs; who, upon that very account, ſhould walk the more circumſpectly, giving no occaſion to the adverſary to ſpeak reproachfully. Perſons that travel in the narrow way ſhould call to mind, that, beſides the all-ſeeing God, a great many others have their eye upon them; who will not pity their failings, and make allowances for them as God will, but ſeverely remark every little error, and repreſent it as criminal, or ridiculous. The moſt commendable way of revenge in this caſe is to diſappoint them; and by a diſcreet, winning, inoffenſive behaviour, to ſtop their mouths, if we cannot change their hearts. And 'tis ſome encouragement, that the caſe of true Chriſtians at preſent is not altogether ſo bad as that of Chriſt's firſt diſciples, who living among men of another religion, were hated and perſecuted the more on that ſcore;

whereas we are all of us, or all to a few, Chriſtians by profeſſion: and, tho' unhappily diſtinguiſh'd by different denominations, which have produced too great an alienation of affections on all ſides, yet the two moſt oppoſite parties among us are thoſe of good men and bad; and the bad, being outwardly of the ſame religion as the good, cannot, for ſhame, be ſo free to cenſure them for their exactneſs in walking according to their common rule. And, beſides this, if we conſider religion under the three heads, of duties relating to *God*, to our *neighbour*, and to *ourſelves*, we ſhall find that the godly are hardly more hated for their ſtrictneſs in thoſe of the firſt and the laſt claſs, that is, for their ſpirituality, their devotion, their watchfulneſs and circumſpection, their purity, mortification and ſelf-denial; than they are prais'd and approv'd for their juſtice and charity, their kindneſs and liberality, their modeſty and ſincerity, and all the other virtues that ſhew their *good will towards men*. And that, for the ſake of theſe latter, the graces which wicked men are no friends to, meet with a more favourable reception than they would otherwiſe do. *Who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?* 1 Pet. iii. 13. There is a ſecret charm in goodneſs and piety, when attended with good nature, and an agreeable converſation, that diſarms envy and malice, poſſeſſes itſelf of the eſteem of bad men, if they are not very bad indeed; and

unites the good, tho' of different perſuaſions in leſſer things, in love to one another. The mutual ſhineſs and diſaffection among true Chriſtians of different parties, and their undervaluing thoughts of one another, are moſt commonly owing to ſome of thoſe imperfections beforemention'd; which, like repelling qualities, hinder that cloſe and ſtrong conjunction, which the ſpirit of unity tends to produce in the Chriſtian world. At worſt, if we ſhould ſuffer in our good name or otherwiſe, we ſhall be happy in this, that we *ſuffer for righteouſneſs ſake*, as the ſame *apoſtle* adds in the *next verſe*. It will be a ſatisfaction that we have not by our own folly and miſmanagement given a handle for ſuch treatment.

2. OUT of regard to religion, we ſhould be mindful of the ſame thing. Every Chriſtian is in a lower ſenſe entruſted with the goſpel of Chriſt; 'tis a *depoſitum* committed to his charge: and he is to keep it with the utmoſt care, both its doctrines, and its precepts; to be tender of its reputation, and reſolv'd to watch againſt every thing that tends to its diſcredit. It muſt be ſuppos'd too, that all who have experienced the power of religion, have a ſuperlative affection for it; that they put the higheſt value on the goſpel which contains ſuch ineſtimable promiſes, and hath produced ſuch bleſſed effects in themſelves. And how then can they be indifferent to what concerns the honour and intereſt of their

holy religion? or be negligent of their behaviour, when the credit of the goſpel depends ſo much upon it? 'Tis impoſſible any ſincerely pious man ſhould be wholly indifferent to the one, or negligent of the other. But there is ſomething more requir'd of us, than barely our not being *indifferent* to the intereſt of religion; and that is, that we be zealouſly affected towards it: quick to ſpy, and as careful to avoid every thing that may prejudice ſo good a cauſe; as 'tis certain we ſhall be, if we eſteem and love our religion in any degree proportionable to what it deſerves from us.

3. We are all bound to deſire and endeavour the ſalvation of others. Nor can any one, that is himſelf in a converted ſtate, be unconcerned about the converſion, and ſpiritual, as well as temporal, happineſs of others. This being ſo; for the ſame reaſon that we are obliged to pray for others, and to ſeek their ſpiritual and everlaſting good, we muſt be obliged to uſe the moſt proper means to this end; to beware of every thing that may tend to harden them in ſin, and prevent their return to God, and to practiſe all thoſe things whereby we may one awaken, and edify, another, may conquer the ſinner's prejudices, and bring him to have other thoughts of the ways of piety. Shall we *deſtroy thoſe for whom Chriſt died?* There is no true Chriſtian would willingly and deliberately do this; there is no ſuch perſon but abhors the thought of it.

But

But let us, my friends, consider, that we may do this without intending it, yea at the same time that we intend the contrary; by not being so watchful over our conduct as is needful. We are not only to regard our actions as to the *substance* of them, but as to their appearance and circumstances; and to order these so, as that by the beauty of holiness, and the force of a commanding example, we may obtain entrance for the truth into the hearts of men.

4. A SENSE of our duty to God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, should persuade us to the same care. Hath the *kindness and love of God appear'd in saving us, not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but of his own free grace and mercy?* hath he translated us from the most miserable into the happiest of all conditions? and can I otherwise than love, and praise, and magnify his name? Or, if I love him as I profess to do, and as his benefits require, can I chuse but be jealous for his honour, and do my utmost to promote his interest among men? Now in order to this our Lord hath told us, that *our light should so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven.* Matth. v. 16. You see, the glory of God is inseparable from that of religion; *that* of religion depends very much on the representation we make of it in our lives. God hath said, that he will be *glorified before all the people,* Lev. x. 3. And we can do this no way

way more effectually, than by an example, of uniform goodneſs, and amiable piety. Then would not the name of God, or that other worthy name, whereby we are called, be blaſphemed: the doctrine of our Saviour would approve itſelf to the very ſenſes of men, when they beheld it ſhining in our converſations, uncloudded by great and avoidable infirmities. O what a tender, what a vigilant concern ſhould we have for the honour of our Redeemer! to whom we are ſo infinitely indebted, and from whom we have receiv'd ſuch proofs of an unparallel'd affection! When any duty is preſs'd upon us for *Chriſt*'s ſake, as in that inſtance 1 *Theſſ.* iv. 1. *Furthermore then we beſeech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jeſus, that as ye have received how you ought to walk, and to pleaſe God, ſo you would abound more and more*; when, I ſay, any duty is urged upon us in this form, the argument ſhould never fail of making a very ſtrong and laſting impreſſion upon us. *By the Lord Jeſus*; that is, by the love of Jeſus to the children of men, in becoming man, and doing and ſuffering ſo much for their ſalvation, which we pretend to admire and celebrate as ſurpaſſing all example: as alſo by the love which we make profeſſion of to Jeſus, we ſhould be perſuaded and taught to do this and that; in order to make him the beſt return we are able for his love, and to give the moſt convincing proof and demonſtration of our own. Once more

5. I MIGHT argue from the obligation we are all under to endeavour after perfection. *Matt.* v. 48. *Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.* James i. 4. *That ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.* Rev. iii. 2. *Be watchful, and ſtrengthen the things that remain, and are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.* To perfect our works, it is not enough that no eſſential part be wanting; but there ſhould be every thing that is requiſite to add a grace and a comelineſs to them, what may ſhew the ſtrength of the principle from which they proceed, and be a kind of poliſhing to them in the ſight of men. The former, indeed, or the eſſential part, is all the perfection neceſſary to entitle them to the goſpel-reward. But ſhall we do no more than juſt what is abſolutely neceſſary to ſave us? They who are ſo frugal in religion, and think it their wiſdom to act here, as in purchaſing worldly things, which they get at as low rates as they can, ſhew themſelves to be wretchedly ignorant of *the things of God.* The truly good man will not *think himſelf to have already attained, or that he is already perfect; but forgetting the things that are behind, will be preſſing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt.* He will labour after what he knows to belong to Chriſtian perfection, in the largeſt extent of that word. I add; that 'tis his duty to labour more fervently than the greater part of Chriſtians do, and to

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ſtudy to know what that perfection is; that, having a clearer idea of it, he may be able to exhibit a fairer and more complete copy of it in his own converſation. I acknowledge, there may be ſometimes greater degrees of real, inward perfection, where the outward example is not ſo engaging; yet ſtill, ſo far, the example is imperfect: and, which muſt not be omitted, the greateſt height and vigour of real religion, that is, of love to God and man, is, on ſuppoſition of an equality in other reſpects, always attended with the greateſt decorum and lovelineſs of the external demeanour. A defect, therefore, muſt certainly lie ſomewhere, either in the underſtanding, or natural temper, or education and principles, of the Chriſtian, or, if not in theſe, in his graces; as often as he gives occaſion, by ſomething or other in his conduct, for his good to be evil ſpoken of.

ALL that remains, is the *application* of this point. Upon which I ſhall be the ſhorter, for that the preceding diſcourſe hath been almoſt wholly practical.

I. I SHALL apply what hath been ſaid more generally. We all bear the Chriſtian name; and, I hope, are inwardly perſuaded of the truth of that religion, which we profeſs. We believe the ſcriptures to be the Word of God; that both Chriſt and his doctrine came down from heaven; we ſhould not be willing to exchange

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our religion for any other; we look on it as the way of life, and truſt to obtain ſalvation by it. In all this we do well: provided we do not ſtop here, and act an inconſiſtent part; in words *own* Chriſt, and in works *deny* him; lay hold of the promiſe, and neglect the condition; profeſs a pure, undefiled religion, and lead corrupt and wicked lives. Let me entreat ſuch, as do thus, not to go on expoſing religion, and themſelves too, after this manner. Let me beg them to reflect, what a deal of miſchief they do the cauſe which they pretend to liſt in the defence of; and how great their folly is to expect to be ſav'd by a religion, the credit of which they are daily undermining by their evil examples. Let them remember this, and ſhew themſelves men. They are reaſonable creatures, and able to diſcern an abſurdity and contradiction in the common conduct of life. And how is it they cannot do the ſame in matters of a higher nature, and more important conſequence? Can there be a more glaring abſurdity than to make their boaſt of the *goſpel*, as the *Jew* formerly did of the *law*, when they live in perpetual contradiction to it, and do all that lies in them to make it appear contemptible in the eyes of the world? Their guilt in *ſinning wilfully after they have received the knowledge of the truth*, and ſaying to Chriſt, *Hail, Maſter, and kiſſing him*, while they betray, and crucify him, is not little; nor will their puniſhment be leſs than their

guilt, if they do not unfeignedly repent, and forſake the way of deſtruction they are now in.

2. As for thoſe that are real as well as nominal Chriſtians; of them it may, in a particular manner, be expected, that they ſhould liſten to the advice that hath been offered them: ſince they muſt own it to be founded in reaſon and ſcripture; and they have that within them which muſt incline them to their duty, of which they are perſuaded. They ſhould *walk circumſpectly, not as fools, but as wiſe*; humbly beg of God to guide them in the right way; and make uſe of that wiſdom, which hath been given them from above, to regulate their behaviour in the minuter parts of it; to the end, there may be nothing wanting in their example to give it its proper evidence and ſucceſs. If it be objected, that ſome of the inſtances before recommended to the Chriſtians care are of a trivial nature, and not worth regarding, (as I am apprehenſive ſome may be ready to imagine:) I take leave to anſwer, that in religion nothing is truly little; not even thoſe things which are of inconſiderable moment, when view'd abſtractedly, in their own nature, or compar'd with ſome others. For as ſoon as they affect religion, and make a part of that, or are connected with what is ſo, they change their rank, tho' not their nature, and become great and weighty. All things are not of the ſame importance, 'tis true; all things are not alike ne-

ceſſary to ſalvation; but all things that have a manifeſt influence on the ſalvation of others, or on our own greater progreſs and perfection, challenge our ſerious notice. There are the *conſtituent* parts of religion, and others that we may call *ornamental*. Every one will confeſs, that the former are to be look'd to in the firſt place. But will any one think this to be a good reaſon for ſlighting the ſecond? One may be compared to the ſtuff of which the garment is made, the other to the ſhape, and trimming; the two latter of which are never entirely diſregarded by thoſe who would be thought moſt indifferent and mortified in their habit. Were we concern'd for no more in our clothes, than juſt to cover our bodies, and keep them warm; there would be no need of troubling ourſelves about the fineneſs, or colour, or faſhion of them; nor any foundation for preferring one to another, in moſt caſes. Now if this would be carrying things to an extreme, (as all acknowledge it would by their practice, which ſhews them to have an eye to *decency*; as well as *neceſſity*, or *convenience*) why ſhould we run into an extreme like this in religion, conſulting only what is of the eſſence of it, or but one remove from eſſential, and overlooking what might be ornamental to it, and ſet it off to greater advantage? In our houſes, and in the appearance we make abroad in the world, we chooſe what we account moſt fit and becoming;

ming; we are not contented to have all things neceſſary for uſe, but we would have them clean, and neat, and in their proper place and order. And, for certain, we ſhould not be more careleſs in our conduct, as it any way relates, tho' but indirectly, to the things of God, and our ſouls; eſpecially, when we attend to the conſequence of our neglect in this caſe. Were the things themſelves as mean and trifling in their own nature, as ſome may conceive them: yet, ſince they draw ſuch conſequences after them; ſince we are like to be more or leſs uſeful, as we obſerve or deſpiſe them; ſince by guarding againſt little blemiſhes, and defects, and indiſcretions, we ſave our religion from contempt, and prepare the way for the converſion, and eſtabliſhment of our neighbour, which, by a contrary management, we ſhould hinder; I think, it evidently follows, that ſuch rules and directions as thoſe before given are not below any one's obſervation. After the actions themſelves, the conſequences of them are to be weigh'd. And herein it is, that the prudent man differs from another; that he looks before him, and around him, and provides againſt the *appearance of evil* in himſelf, becauſe of thoſe *real evils* that may follow in reſpect of others. Whatever truth there may be in that *Jewiſh* proverb, that the chief things which will undo the world are the follies of religious men; he would not willingly countenance

countenance and make it good by his own inadvertency and miſconduct.

I SHALL conclude with a word or two to thoſe, who, from the infirmities and failings of Chriſtian profeſſors, take occaſion to *ſpeak evil* of that which is *good*. This practice is very *unreaſonable*, very *unjuſt*, and very *wicked*.

IT is very *unreaſonable* and *fooliſh* not to diſtinguiſh between good and bad; but to confound them in our cenſure, and reject that which is good, becauſe it is not abſolutely pure and unmix'd. What if there be ſome failings that accompany real goodneſs? That which was really good before continues ſo notwithſtanding this union. Gold does not ceaſe to be gold, becauſe it is mix'd with ſome droſs; nor is the quantity or value of it ever the leſs in itſelf; as will appear the moment we come to ſeparate them. In other caſes, we do not think the worſe of valuable qualities and attainments for their being ſometimes found in conjunction with great imperfections. It is not made an objection againſt *knowledge*, that the moſt knowing men are not always the beſt-natur'd, or moſt virtuous; but we can tell how to value skill in any profeſſion, and are glad to make uſe of it, how unhappily ſoever it be match'd. And why muſt religion alone meet with ſuch hard and unequal uſage, for no other reaſon, but that we find in the votaries of it ſome things which were better wanting?

SUCH

SUCH proceeding is *unjuſt*, as well as *unreaſonable*. There is a great deal of injuſtice to the *religious perſon*, who, governing himſelf in the main of his behaviour by the principles of reaſon and conſcience, deſerves our eſteem, in ſpite of ſome little imperfections, which are by far too light to weigh down his many virtues. Such a one, with all his defects, makes a character greatly ſuperior to any man's, that is complaiſant, frank, liberal, diſcreet, and every thing but religious: and much more then to theirs, who are little leſs wanting in *civil* and *moral*, than in *religious* accompliſhments; which deſcribes the greater number of thoſe who are moſt ſevere and witty on the ſlips and weakneſſes of good men. The injuſtice to *religion* is yet greater than to the religious, in loading it with the imperfections of thoſe that profeſs it: which, whatever they are, they brought over with them from their former ſtate; which, moreover, religion doth not allow of, but reprove and condemn, and, if permitted to have its perfect work, would quickly correct. As far as any man frames his temper and way of life by the rules of religion, there is nothing in it that can juſtly offend and diſpleaſe; what there is of this kind proceeds not from religion, but from the want of it, or from natural temper, incapacity, and human weakneſs, falſe notions, ill habits contracted before converſion, *&c.* and is therefore very unjuſtly

juſtly made uſe of to traduce and diſgrace religion. But why does not religion cure men of all theſe weakneſſes and diſtempers? Not becauſe the principles of religion, and the grace of God are unactive, impotent things; but becauſe they work not, as it is not fit they ſhould, without our concurrence.

FINALLY, this method of dealing with religion is extremely *profane* and *wicked*, being an affront to God himſelf, whoſe image and inſtitution it is: his *inſtitution*, as it is contain'd in the holy ſcriptures; his *image*, as exemplified in the renewed ſoul. What ſaith our bleſſed Saviour to his diſciples? *He, that deſpiſeth you, deſpiſeth me; and he, that deſpiſeth me, deſpiſeth him that ſent me.* The contempt of religion is really a contempt of God, who is the ſupreme fountain and author of it; the reproaches of them that reproach it fall on him; and he will not hold them guiltleſs, who offer him ſuch indignities. Nay, though it could be ſuppos'd that wicked men confin'd their mockery to the *perſons* of the godly, without making a jeſt immediately of godlineſs itſelf, yet will not God leave them unpuniſh'd: both for the ſake of the righteous, whoſe characters, as ſupreme governor and judge of the world, he is concern'd to vindicate, one time or other; and for his own, whoſe image and likeneſs, delineated upon them, ought to be reſpected, though done in none of the

the brighteſt colours, and ſet in an indifferent frame. To treat this divine image after a different manner ſhews a root of bitterneſs within, and that men hate God and religion, tho' they dare not openly avow it.

F I N I S.